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LIFE ON THE LAND

The Interrelationship between
Identity and Community in the Irish Fiction
of
Maria Edgeworth, William Carleton and Charles Lever

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SUMMARY

This thesis examines and evaluates the response made by three nineteenth century Irish writers of fiction to the most pressing social problem of their time, namely: How might life on the land be firmly established and maintained? The three writers concerned - Maria Edgeworth, William Carleton and Charles Lever - are shown to possess a common artistic vision, which is presented as an answer to the question posed. The answer consists of a demonstration of how the resources of an enabling individual must blend with the requirements of life on the land as it is.

By way of introduction, the significance of the theme for both the literary and socio-political contexts of the period (1800-1872) is described, and the problems of dealing with nineteenth century Irish fiction - problems concerned with its status in the national cultural heritage, its variety and its artistic characteristics - are outlined.

The four Irish novels of Maria Edgeworth are given a special status in her overall output, and her handling of the theme in them is considered as the prototype of her successors' manner of dealing with it. Carleton and Lever are taken as portraying the Edgeworth model under stress. Carleton's work is represented by a selection of pieces from his Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry; Lever's by three novels from the 1850's and '60's. All three writers are located in their contemporary cultural milieux, and their individual treatments of the theme are described and compared.

In conclusion, a general characterisation of the type of fiction produced by the trio is offered, and a basis for its artistic relationship to Irish fiction of more recent times is rehearsed.

The thesis facilitates a new periodisation of the history of nineteenth century Irish fiction. It also offers a revised conception of a tradition of Irish fiction. These are the contributions it makes to knowledge of the subject treated.

INTRODUCTION

1 The Status of Nineteenth Century Irish Fiction

The purpose of this thesis is to provide an overview of the fiction produced by three ostensibly unrelated nineteenth century Irish authors, Maria Edgeworth, William Carleton, and Charles Lever.

Each of these authors has a niche in nineteenth century literary history. Maria Edgeworth, as the author of Castle Rackrent, 'the first regional novel in English, and perhaps in all Europe',¹ occupies the securest position. Carleton has an enduring place in his homeland for being 'the great memorialist of the peasant civilization of Ireland which perished with the Famine.'² And Lever is, at least, an interesting example of Victorian pen-fever.³

Yet the status of all three has to some extent been obscured by the critical criteria applied in the revaluation of Irish literary culture which took place, broadly speaking, in the years 1891-1922, the years of the Irish Renaissance. These criteria were brought into being by two distinct, though not entirely unrelated schools of thought, one with a bias of nationalist ideology, whose most notable spokesman was Daniel Corkery; the other, with a predominant emphasis on artistic excellence, articulated by W.B. Yeats.

Edgeworth and Lever particularly suffered at the hands of the nationalists. The former, for example, was criticised in the following terms:

. But as for entering into the national aspirations of Ireland, or realising that Ireland had a significant history of its own out of which a new history should develop, she would have been incapable of such flights.⁴

Lever is summarily dismissed for belonging to a 'shameful literary tradition'.⁵ And it is noteworthy that in the two most notable works produced by leading cultural politicians of the day, one makes no mention of nineteenth century Irish fiction, while the other gives it short shrift.⁶

The attitudes of such critics are misleading. There is a narrowness in them which desires to override - and, indeed, implicitly to deny - the complexities and contradictions of the national literary heritage. The decay of community, the fragmentation of common cause, the illusory sense of both past and future, are among the most deep-seated and abiding fears in nineteenth century Irish fiction. These fears, which the trio of authors dealt with below particularly tried to comprehend, achieved their most ironical realisation in the works of those nationalist critics who repudiated their terms of comprehension.

Nevertheless, the nationalist critics must not be dismissed. Their historical outlook was the result of a desire for historical processes to be reversed, as well as for a new perspective on national culture to hold sway. They witnessed a turn of historical events in their favour. Naturally enough, they believed that the triumph of that moment - particularly since it could be seen as much a victory for ideological intensity as for actual force of arms - provided the energy to restructure the view of the past. Interestingly, the terms used by a contemporary American critic suggest some of the contradictions of the effort to restructure, when applied to literature:

The value of the fiction of the period before the great famine is on the whole historical in the larger sense: not artistic. It takes on significance chiefly as a remaking of Irish life, which, by virtue of such artistic qualities as it possesses, does what history proper can hardly do - creates the illusion of the life of the past.

In other words, the ultimate aim of nineteenth century fiction is to create history. This is done by employing methods superior to those of the historian, even though the end product - 'the illusion' - seems to be an attenuation of the veracious, though

evidently somewhat lifeless, picture drawn by the recorder of facts. The artist cannot exist alongside the historian, it seems: somehow the notion of believing in fiction as such is inconceivable. And the past remains locked in its pastness; this is the achievement of 'remaking'. In attempting to marry two kinds of intellectual attainment, both ostensibly concerned with matters of record, Krans only reminds us of how separate and distinct they are. Yet we find essentially the same view repeated by a more powerful mind with a more intimate perspective on Irish literature, who discovered early in his writing career 'that there was nothing before George Moore in prose ... except minor forerunners, who are of no interest to anybody but historians.'⁸ The emphasis on artistic achievement, if not this particular judgement, is a tacit tribute to Yeats, particularly to Yeats in his role of critic of nineteenth century Irish literature.

To a large extent our appreciation of nineteenth century Irish literature - particularly verse, of course - echoes Yeats's appreciations. But, as can be seen from his articles on Mangan, Ferguson, Allingham and the poets of the Nation,⁹ Yeats emphasised in his artistic forbears only those characteristics which he found attractive, and those techniques and concerns which nurtured his own developing craft. In assuming the role of cultural trustee he did take nineteenth century Irish fiction into account, however, most notably in a short-lived enthusiasm for Carleton. As might be expected the raw power and sense of hidden native life which are Carleton's distinguishing marks claim most of his attention, the better, one feels, because of its stimulus to the Blake-haunted fledgeling poet. Carleton's background is where 'this strange Gaelic race lives between two worlds, the world of its poverty, and a world of

wild memories and of melancholy, beautiful imaginations.'¹⁰

The latter captivated Yeats who, more so than Carleton perhaps, is, as an Anglo-Irish, impoverished poet who also favoured the peasantry, a man between two worlds. It was undoubtedly true that Carleton tried to bridge a cultural divide, but of the clearest sign of his efforts to do so Yeats remained silent.

This sign was the unfortunate tendency to editorialise into which Carleton liked to lapse and which vitiates all his work. In attempting to assess it, Yeats is forced to dismiss all of Carleton except two of what he correctly calls 'long stories',¹¹ Fardorougha the Miser and The Black Prophet. Despite his elevation of these two powerful pieces, it does seem strange that the question of Carleton's unevenness doesn't arise, or when it does that it should be glossed over as Carleton's exploitation of the reading public:

When about 1820 [actually 1828], his short stories began appearing, there was no Irish public taking Irish things seriously, and the general reading world had agreed to find certain attributes of Irish peasant life more marketable than others. They wanted to laugh a great deal, and they did not mind weeping a little, but they wished all through to retain their sense of superiority. Carleton could not help being a little conscious of this...¹²

This view contains numerous inaccuracies of fact and uncertainties of emphasis, but the salient point is Yeats's emphasis on Carleton the artist, not the Carleton whose art was given form and point by finding himself needing a way out of the cultural impasse in which he found himself on arrival in Dublin. A clearer expression of the same emphasis is his condemnation of Carleton's most elaborate novel, Valentine M'Clutchy: 'the artist has passed, and only the politician remains: so that the novel would be intolerable but for its wild humour and the presence of the village madman, in

whose half-inspired and crazy oratory Carleton seems to pour himself out.¹³

Yeats felt more strongly about Carleton than any other Irish novelist, though interestingly when speaking of nineteenth century Irish fiction¹⁴ his main interest is in realism. The lists of books he produced in this period¹⁵ all contain novels with some kind of socio-historical slant. The poet's artistic orientation survives this criterion in the majority of these early critical occasions, though the claim that Lever's Charles O'Malley should be seen to be as 'true a record'¹⁶ as Carleton's Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry indicates that he was altogether immune from the ideological trends of the day, since, as will be seen below, Lever cannot be regarded as a documentarist of Carleton's, or any other contemporary's, calibre.

Generally speaking, however, nationalist critics reject the fiction of their predecessors on the grounds of ideological inadequacy, while Yeats partially redeems it by a selective account of its artistic merits. The critical standpoint of this thesis, however, is intended to facilitate not a divergence of emphases, but a confrontation with the totality of each author's characteristic outlook. This entails an exploration of the evidently necessary interdependence in their work of ideology and artistry, and of the ultimate expressive outcome of the competing claims of these two distinctive frameworks, which gives their fiction such an inescapably contemporary character. The degree of preoccupation with, and pressure from, contemporary life has been noted as a keystone of nineteenth century Irish fiction:

The English novelist was concerned with social choice and personal morality ... But to the Irish novelist these were subordinated to questions of race, creed and nationality...¹⁷

That last verb has a simplifying effect. Irish novelists did not so much respond to a predetermined hierarchy of questions as attempt to find some way, in keeping with the context and character of their own experiences, of aligning the public and personal realms of contemporary life.

In other words, it is my contention that over and above their undoubted preoccupation with their own socio-cultural awareness - indeed, precisely because of it - the trio of novelists which concern me synthesise a version of its character the most important access to which is provided by the fictional structure which delimits it. They were not simply reproducing unfavourable, or artistically wayward, depictions of their world. They were producing a vision of that world, and, as we shall see, it is their irresistible urgency so to do which is responsible for ideological emphasis and artistic shortcomings. Much more than a representation of the actual, they craved an enactment of the ideal, all their authorial faculties being subservient to a projection of what is socially desirable, not to case-histories of the real. And it is with a reading of the typical, and recurring, fictional underpinnings of their common vision that this thesis is concerned, dwelling, from the variety of ways available, on a theme shared by all three, from different standpoints, which seems to me to illustrate best the problematic alignment of public and personal realms, the theme of interrelationship between identity and community in the context of life on the land.

2 Historical and Cultural Contexts of Nineteenth Century Irish Fiction

The distinctive character of nineteenth century Irish fiction may be related, to some extent, to the character of the

social conditions from which it emerged. In contrast to those European countries in which major works of fiction were produced in the nineteenth century, Ireland had no experience of industrialisation. Cities did not expand, the countryside was not significantly mined or quarried or built upon, the rhythm of national life was not altered by changes in the nature of work and of community. Politically, the nineteenth century saw the emergence of nation states, the endurance of republican ideals. Instead of exemplifying that achievement, Ireland suffered a succession of political eclipses which, in conjunction with economic neglect and indifferent administration, made it a struggle to sustain the country's population, a struggle which suffered a decisive and traumatic reversal during the famine of 1845-9 - usually called 'the Great Famine' to distinguish it from other outbreaks before and afterwards: 'a period of greater misery in a prolonged age of suffering.'¹⁸

The country lacked a parliament, its capital was rapidly becoming a backwater, its social and economic health was in the hands of largely indifferent landowners - so large was their indifference that middlemen were hired to oversee the land while their masters repaired to the safety and diversion of town (meaning any resort between Bath and Baden). Naturally there were significant local exceptions to this general state of affairs (the Edgeworth estate was one such). But in general the admonition that 'property had its duties as well as its privileges'¹⁹ fell on deaf ears. Irish social reality was conceived around a dilemma, was forced to act out its own intricate problematic: How is life on the land to be lived?

A variety of answers was provided to this question. In the socio-political sphere two deserve some attention.. The first is that provided by the peasantry, who banded together in secret

societies in order to intimidate the arbiters of local conditions into a reconsideration of their policies (perhaps to express their own sense of intimidation). Their achievement, however, is debatable. Even at their most successful their efforts are characterised by uncoördination and an absence of political awareness. Yet, allowing for the sporadic nature of the activities, the parochial orientation and the mixture of motives governing the rank and file,²⁰ the largely unrelenting persistence over two generations, to no end, is a remarkable expression of rage and frustration.

The second answer proposed was that of the agitation led by Daniel O'Connell. It has been argued that it was O'Connell who designed a collective consciousness for the peasantry by modernising them, directing their attention and their appetite for social engagement towards Westminster, the one source to which they could realistically apply for relief.²¹ The introduction of what came to be known as monster-meetings provided a dramatic means of registering the immense and salient presence of the masses. As such, they must have worked wonders for the masses' confidence; not within living memory had they had so public a leader. Yet, for the masses, contribution to the reservoir of moral force was not without cost. Two areas vital to the peasant sense of identity were levied.

The first of these is language. O'Connell, more than any other single individual (and thus, probably unfairly), has been charged with the extirpation of the Irish language. He has been credited with the remark that "...he could witness without a sigh, the gradual disuse of Irish..."²² The results of this attitude have been described as follows:

In his time the language was practically nothing but a vernacular. It was alive in a peasant mind, and nowhere else. And it was these very peasants who most worshipped O'Connell. He was one to be listened to. They must have translated his phrase into: keep Irish from the children. Only too well they did so in the years to come.²³

O'Connell's lawyer's mind ('a disastrous type of mind'²⁴) exhibited qualities of irreverence and attack, with the tone of which at least the peasantry could identify. If the people of Ireland were ever going to articulate their way out of their situation, instead of sporadically and incoherently attempting to hack their way free, then they would have to learn the appropriate language. 'Actually among the people, his words did less harm than they might'²⁵ - probably, but the spectacular peasant response to O'Connell's two major campaigns (one of which was a resounding success) gave English much more prestige than it would otherwise have enjoyed, and impressed the masses not only as a modern means of communication but as the last word in conceptual equipment.

But it is difficult to assess what conceptual use the peasantry made of English. It may well be that O'Connell revived the spirits of the peasantry by offering himself as an embodiment of what he believed they might become. But in fact, great as his achievements were, they changed little in the peasants' life. The Relief Bill which granted Catholic Emancipation and partial enfranchisement introduced the country to modern democratic methods. In doing so it completely transformed the country's political potential. The campaign for repeal of the Act of Union, though itself a failure, set Irish political endeavour on a course from which it subsequently never deviated. But in neither of those campaigns did the land question figure. This I take to be his second major affront to the typicality of Irish life. Moreover, in presenting

himself as a national rallying point he evidently felt no necessity to create a nationwide party, but rather relied on ad hoc arrangements appropriate to each campaign. Obviously this approach had practical advantages (for example, its looseness helped swift regrouping in periods of official harassment), but from it the peasantry learned more about following than leading. It could be argued that in associating themselves with O'Connell's goals their attention was drawn from their own humbler, but certainly no less vital ones. Ironically, it wasn't until the year of O'Connell's death that some hard thinking about the land was done in public. That year - 'black '47', traditionally thought of as the worst of the Great Famine - James Fintan Lalor 'emerged from total obscurity... with a series of open letters to the Nation in which he developed his central thesis that repeal of the Union was a matter of secondary importance compared with the protection and well-being of the Irish tenant-farmers'.²⁶

O'Connell's main contribution to nineteenth century Ireland may be described as a location of potential. His effect on material conditions seems to have been minimal. However, his reliance on English as a key weapon in the arsenal of agitation may be taken as a tacit legitimisation of an Irish literature in English, and may even help clear it of the charge that it sought an English audience. Like O'Connell, the Irish novelists were, for the most part, committed to representing the Irish case. What could be more logical than to make the representations to those who, through ignorance or indifference, were implicated in the state of affairs existing in the sister kingdom?[?]

The Irish novelists were, to a man, however, conservative: their work is pervaded by nostalgia, by hopes that the future will

resemble the nebulous past as much as possible. But this is merely another aspect of the way in which they transmitted their sense of how things should be. Rather than embody a sense of dynamic, productive change, their work focusses on harmless, idealised change. Yet to expect any of the participants in the contemporary public scene to possess a sense of social dynamics or of historical perspective would be to nullify the form of historical experience which they inherited and to which, in some cases, they were witness - a form whose constituent elements were irresolution, cynicism and shortsightedness. The Irish novel in this period is deeply suspicious of the notion of process, political or otherwise. There is no O'Connell novel,²⁷ and the reference to more recent practices with which Lever concludes his 'Tale of the Time of the Union' makes explicit what the silence of his colleagues implies:

Of the period which we have endeavoured to picture some meagre resemblance, unhappily, the few traces remaining are those most to be deplored. The Poverty, Misery, and the Anarchy survive: the Genial Hospitality, the warm attachment to Country, the cordial generosity of Irish feeling, have sadly declined. Let us hope that from the depth of our present sufferings better days are about to dawn, and a period approaching, when Ireland shall be "Great" in the happiness of her people, "Glorious" in the development of her inexhaustible resources, and "Free," by that best of freedom, free from the trammels of an unmeaning party warfare, which has ever subjected the welfare of the country to the miserable intrigues of a few adventurers.²⁸

The sense of social dislocation brought about by the Act of Union was sharply clarified by the novelty - and, to non-adherents, the incomprehensibility - of O'Connell's political innovations. O'Connell's success, conceived in the name of, and delivered, to the Catholic populace, created tremors of cultural alienation.

Another source of the same kind of unease was the condition of Dublin which, with the Union, ceased to be relevant as a capital,

a dramatic and precipitate decline indeed from the glorious days of its Georgian facelift, the underpinnings of which 'show a very high degree of enlightened planning, and were well in advance of their time.'²⁹ From enlightenment to irrelevance in the space of less than a generation is a severe challenge to any culture's adaptability. From incipient nationhood, to the status of a client was a shift in emphasis sufficient to inhibit the possibility of cultural continuity, even if Irish culture in the eighteenth century had been flourishing.

'The rapid advances in material culture which took place during the middle third of the century (i.e. from about 1733 to 1766) are not exactly paralleled in the culture of the mind.'³⁰

And a contemporary critic wrote at the close of the century:

were the abilities of the Irish to be estimated by their literary productions...they would scarcely rank higher than those nations who had just emerged from barbarism and incivility.³¹

Yet it is not correct to make the general assertion that 'in the eighteenth century nobody using English sought to explore Ireland's intellectual inheritance.'³² Perhaps the impulse to do so was not national in origin, but rather the product of the cult of the picturesque which manifested itself in a rapid growth of interest in Celtic antiquities. The origin of this particular enthusiasm has been said to date from the middle years of the eighteenth century³³ and, no doubt carried forward by the tidal wave of interest which engulfed literary Europe after the publication of the Ossian forgeries, produced its first literary landmark in Charlotte Brooke's Reliques of Irish Poetry (1789), a compilation of 'originals and translations.'³⁴

Novel and pioneering as this volume was, it should not be overrated. Its importance in Irish literary history lies in its timing: 'It is as if she had become one with those members of the Courts of Poetry which then were just after closing their doors.'³⁵ There is a sharp irony here. At the very time when original verse in Irish was perishing from cultural inanition and, perhaps consequentially, from stylistic over-elaboration and paucity of themes, Miss Brooke reproduces many of these deficiencies in her renderings. A noted translator of our own time has said bluntly, 'Miss Brooke's translations are about as bad as they could be',³⁶ and even if 'worse have been produced in our own days',³⁷ their importance is not so much imaginative but historical, 'because they represent the beginning of a new cultural nationalism to replace that which was lost in the Cromwellian invasions.'³⁸ As noted, such a beginning, at least the embryo of a beginning, predates the appearance of the Reliques, and at least one intellectual family, the Edgeworths, do not seem to have been impressed by it.³⁹

Nevertheless, Miss Brooke's efforts did have some important effects. The Reliques posited rather than explored a connection between what was affecting to the sensibility and what was germane to cultural consciousness. Various other collections of verse and song in the manner of the Reliques appeared in its wake, and undoubtedly Miss Brooke straightened the path to fashionable success for Thomas Moore and his melodies.

It wasn't until a generation later that the implied connection began to be explored, firstly in the Dublin University Magazine, founded in 1833 by 'a little group of Tory juveniles.'⁴⁰ The magazine saw itself in an integrative role, contributing to the idea of Irish culture by working out its own version of it.

One of the first artistic steps in this direction was taken by Samuel Ferguson in his extended critique of a Brooke-like anthology, Hardiman's Irish Minstrelsy (1831), in which he gave his own versions of some of the contents, as well as correcting the translations provided.⁴¹ Not content with translations and corrections, Ferguson turned in time to composing sonorous sub-epic narrative poems on themes from Irish myth and saga, a resource well-noted by Yeats whose youthful enthusiasm for Ferguson certainly overstates his achievement:

Sir Samuel Ferguson, I contend, is the greatest Irish poet, because in his poems and the legends, they [mythical characters] embody more completely than in any other man's writings the Irish character. Its unflinching devotion to some single aim. Its passion. "The food of the passions is bitter, the food of the spirit is sweet," say the wise Indians. And this faithfulness to things tragic and bitter, to thoughts that wear one's life out and scatter one's joys, the Celt has above all others. Those who have it, alone are worthy of great causes. Those who have it not, have in them some vein of hopeless levity, the harlequins of the earth.'⁴²

It is doubtful if Ferguson consistently viewed himself as a 'cultural ideologist.'⁴³ His antiquarian-poetic leanings enabled him to arrive at a position which protected him from confronting the actual. Ferguson's work is in every way exemplary, but in its aversion to politics it seems to oblige the status quo, espousing implicitly the remoteness and conservatism which the Dublin University Magazine made no apologies for openly upholding. His verse turns out to be meditations on, recapitulations and reminiscences of, heroic action, the momentum of a tribe, past emotional intensities.

Such poetic subject matter, expressed intermittently in the metre of Irish verse, indicates the somewhat deserted state of mind of the Ascendancy in these years. Their concern with the formulation of a fresh cultural identity was seen as an end in itself,

or as a task worth doing for its own sake. In direct contrast to the Dublin University Magazine's outlook, the Nation, founded in 1842, was aggressively candid about the radicalism of its own ideological position, and viewed the establishment of cultural identity as an essential precondition for revolutionising Irish society. The paper's policy has been summarised as follows:

The Nation writers saw their task as that of creating [a] national spirit, as being "the voice of national self-respect". The paper, in addition to its detailed reporting of Repeal activities, was packed with stories celebrating the heroic past of Ireland; biographies of saints, scholars and soldiers; all aspects of native culture were encouraged, including exhortations to the people to retain their own language as a badge of nationhood; fragments of the old literature were translated, and new "patriotic" ballads were published. No man was to be debarred from membership of the Irish nation because of his religion or his pedigree...⁴⁴

The raw material used by the Nation was the same as that featured in the Dublin University Magazine, to some extent, at any rate, but the verbs used in describing the Nation's bias just now would be misapplied in an assessment of the Dublin University Magazine's offering. Not content with attempting to bring about a radicalisation of cultural response, however, the Young Irelanders, whose organ the Nation was, attempted to radicalise the nature of contemporary political debate, first by challenging the leadership of an ailing and unproductive O'Connell, and eventually by an abortive mobilisation of a famine-ridden peasantry in the painfully laughable revolt of 1848. This outbreak resulted in the transportation of most of the movement. Interestingly, though, the one prominent Young Irelander who managed to remain in Ireland after '48, Charles Gavan Duffy (one of the Nation's founders, in fact), turned his attention now to the political reality of the land, a reorientation which in the long run proved more revolutionary than

anything contained in the fiery rhetoric of his erstwhile comrades. With a slackening of intensity in the debate about cultural identity which came about in the years after the famine, the Dublin University Magazine declined as an organ of any significance.

Dislocation and resilience, then, were the characteristics of the Irish social context in the years after the Union, characteristics which can be seen to interact very plainly in the public activities of the period. This interaction produced alignments of policy so strong that we may suspect that part of the rhetoric that continually rent the air was intended to meet the sense of tentative renewal which objectively existed in the country, rather than to promote permanent solutions as was ostensibly claimed. But if the variety and strength of response is impressive, it remains a puzzle that all seemed to avoid the state of the nation's undeniable reality, the land. Those who gave any time and thought to the land question were few and far between. Among them, however, are a trio of novelists - Maria Edgeworth, William Carleton and Charles Lever.

3 Edgeworth, Carleton, Lever and the Contemporary Literary Context

The grouping together of the three authors to be dealt with in this thesis is facilitated solely by the similarities which exist in their ostensibly different resolutions of a common problematical theme. In itself this theme is by no means consistently present in their individual oeuvres. Yet it does seem to elicit and demonstrate both their greatest artistic strengths, however limited, and their most coherent cultural vision, however ideologically restricted. Too many discrepancies exist between their political outlooks, temperaments and the courses of their careers for it to be argued that in their common concerns they constitute a school, or a

movement. Nevertheless, despite these lacunae, and indeed despite the fact that each of them had very different experiences of life on the land, the treatment of their common theme seems to me to be sufficiently serious, comprehensive and, above all, so explicitly addressed to faithfully reproducing the fixtures and norms of contemporary reality, that it represents the most significant contribution made by fiction to the evolution of nineteenth century Irish cultural awareness.

Significant it may be, however, but it is not entirely typical of the contemporary contribution being made by Irish fiction. For example, it is not in the fiction examined below that one finds the development of, or capitalisation on, the Ossianic sensibility, from which grew continental interest in early nineteenth century Ireland.⁴⁵ For this one must refer to the novels of Lady Morgan, laden with picturesque paraphernalia - foaming mountain streams, tempestuous chieftains, and the like - which, 'As much as any single force did... made liberal opinion in England receptive to Irish Catholic claims,'⁴⁶ aided by the author's performances in Regency drawing rooms of sad songs of the homeland with harp accompaniment. The impact of these novels on the Irish public seems to have been less emphatic. Her Dublin salon of the 1830s appears to have had little cultural influence. The image of Ireland being created by the conservative intelligentsia of the Dublin University Magazine, the aesthetic components of which were not entirely unrelated to those of her ladyship's fabrications, ultimately repudiated her publicly successful, but inwardly tawdry, blend of theatricality, jacobinism and sentimentality.

If the quality of Lady Morgan's contribution to the developing cultural debate is dubious, nevertheless the fashionable mode of fiction she employed can be regarded as an artistic stimulus

to the majority of her contemporaries, though the trio concerning us here should not be included in that particular number. Those who may be discussed under the aegis of her initiative fall into two categories. The initiative, from a generic standpoint, may be termed the romance, and twin aspects of this formal innovation are reflected in the two categories I have in mind, namely the gothic romance and the historical romance.

Of these, the former is the least significant, since it has only two major exponents. The earliest of them, Charles Maturin, in fact expressed his spleen against writing romances in the preface to his most celebrated production, Melmoth the Wanderer.⁴⁷ He also produced a fictional critique of the Morgan cult of sensibility in his The Wild Irish Boy, a novel whose title owes everything to her ladyship's greatest success, The Wild Irish Girl by which sobriquet she became known. However, Maturin's pronouncements⁴⁸ place him artistically, if not temperamentally, in the Lady Morgan camp, and in fact it is his intense, and intensive, exploration of them which gives him a distinctive place in Irish fiction.⁴⁹ This place would be unique, in fact, were it not for the greater discipline and finesse with which his artistic legatee, Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu, suggested the psycho-cultural substructure of Maturin's stock-in-trade - place, personality and atmosphere.

There is no space here to argue fully that the second category, the historical romance, is the obverse of the former. It is revealing, however, that the novelists who developed this particular sub-genre also tended to focus their attention on the staple elements attributed to Maturin above, and that their fictional palettes are more notable for their gothic hues than for their intellectual,

analytical content, such as one might expect to find in works which, thematically at any rate, seem dependent on Scott. No doubt Lady Morgan's prominent displays of local colour may be likened to Scott's reliance on the same feature. But in Scott's work, romantic locale is part of the overall intellectual fabric, whereas for 'the wild Irish girl' intellectual considerations have nothing to do with the case. Yet if her works are largely a tissue of gestures and sensations, the fact that she chooses to situate them, for the most part, in even a pseudo-historicist framework, provides at least an implicit link between psychological and historical areas. It is to the development, or promotion (as distinct from the analysis), of this link that some of her younger contemporaries addressed themselves. Moreover, in a broader context the two most important of them, John Banim and Gerald Griffin were members of 'the scapegrace but comradely gang of Irish literary freebooters',⁵⁰ which flourished in London during the 1820s, when prevailing literary taste was for the theatrical, the spectacular, and the emotional.

Despite the influence of Scott's originality (for which Scott declared himself indebted to Maria Edgeworth!⁵¹) and his success, the fiction produced by Banim and Griffin tends unwittingly away from the novel mode and towards the romance. While it is admittedly misleading to treat their work with this degree of generality (my only justification is that of brevity), it may be claimed that the result of this tendency is an absence of overview, of analysis, and of mind as a rationalising, integrity-vouchsafing agency. In Griffin's fiction this may be observed in the strong sense of guilt and self-destruction which accompanies the protagonists' possession of consciousness. The notion of history as process is devalued by the very faculty which could demonstrate it. In the case of Banim

the individual mind tends to the disenfranchised by the existence of a more subversive, unspecified, collective facsimile of its properties, located in ghosts, fetches and the like. (It does not seem to me that the use of folkloric material as such entitles 'the O'Hara Family' - under which pseudonym John Banim, assisted by his brother Michael, wrote - to be regarded as the first Irish novelists, as has been argued recently.⁵²)

These generalised remarks are intended to suggest given authors' predominant tendencies. In dealing with nineteenth century Irish fiction it is misleading to suggest that a particular author availed of only one formal option. Sheridan Le Fanu wrote an historical novel which found favour with Young Ireland.⁵³ Lever and Samuel Lover, both renowned and execrated for the exploitation of the Irish picaro, composed historical romances. As for Carleton, folkloric elements, gothicised and au naturel abound in his works, and are given such prominence on occasion that the narrator's standpoint is that of an anthropologist with scene-painting inclinations, a manner which Carleton possibly adopted from his mentor, Caesar Otway, whose own travel works are 'still readable',⁵⁴ not least for their anthropological interest. Lever, in the preface to one of his more accomplished historical romances, is quite candid about the inspirational value of a picturesque landscape:

For an opening scene what could I desire finer than the gloomy grandeur and rugged desolation of Glenflesk! and if some patches of bright verdure here and there gleamed amidst the barrenness - if a stray sunlight lit up the granite cliffs and made the heather glow, might there not be certain reliefs of human tenderness and love to show that no scene in which man has a part is utterly destitute of those affections whose home is the heart? I had now got my theme and my locality. ⁵⁵

And even in the work of that most sensible of anti-romancers, Maria Edgeworth, gothic traces have been detected.⁵⁶

On the other hand, neither Griffin nor Eanim are oblivious to preoccupations with the relationship between identity and community. Like the trio of writers concerning us here, contemporary reality was very vividly before them as they wrote. This is evident in circumstantial details of their work, such as their implicit, and unexplained, rejection of Dublin as a fictional locale. But it is also to be noted, conceptually speaking, in their overwhelming desire for reconciliation, peace and stability, for an end to haunting, whether social or personal. And so great is that desire that, irrespective of authorial tendency, it unbalances the vehicle of expression to which it is harnessed. Like their counterparts in the basically non-romance tradition, their work suffers from two related handicaps. It desires to articulate a sense of wholeness deriving from disparate, and essentially antagonistic, areas of experience. And it additionally depends for the achievement of such a sense on authorial intervention in propria persona, itself evidence of a compulsively stabilising imperative. What weakens all nineteenth century Irish fiction is the very insistence that wholeness be manifested at all costs, though it is that insistence, and the manner of its fictional structuring, which gives nineteenth century Irish fiction its distinctive character.

However, though the work of Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever may be associated, by the highlighting of certain emphases, with other contemporary fiction, it is, when most characteristic, distinct from it. This is so because it continually attempts to transcend its material, continually attempts to translate it into a vision of positive, socially-enabling deliverance. These attempts are made in terms which are required to facilitate an interrelationship between identity and community. Such a vision is not a structuring norm

of Griffins or Banim's work. Of them it may be said that their fictional effects and occasions are indulged rather than translated, and it is this characteristic which confines them to Lady Morgan's camp. However, such a characterisation of their work is not intended to suggest its inferiority to that of Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever, the quality of whose fiction is certainly very often pallid and tendentious. Their significance lies in their distinctive orientation, yet the full weight of it cannot be appreciated in an examination of the oeuvre of any one of them. For all the interest of their common standpoint, their individual possession of it is so partial and restricted that only an overview of its collective character does it full justice.

4 Identity, Community and Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever

Unevenness and imbalance are the keynotes of both nineteenth century Irish fiction and its contexts. But whereas such characteristics have, on the whole, been the basis for the rejection of the period by most modern commentators, it seems to me the essential basis for retaining the sense of its origin. Moreover, the practitioners of nineteenth century Irish fiction were themselves aware of the tensions and contradictions of the overall situation out of which their work came, and attempted to allay them. Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever select themselves for being so closely aware of the root problem of the national malaise, by virtue of their education, their relationship to the various contemporary cultural forums, or both. Above all, as far as this thesis is concerned, their work contains a similar pattern of response, approaching a central preoccupation from different directions. This pattern of response

may be described as a recurring attempt to depict a necessary relationship between identity and community.

Several points arise out of this characterisation of their efforts. First of all, I have deliberately described the terms of the sought-after relationship in generalised, abstract terms. This usage is intended to convey the generalised, distanced view of the two terms found in the work of the three authors, the tendency to deal in stereotypes and stock situations, their invariable reposing of energy in the peasantry even though this class is the most volatile, most easily led, and essentially the most subversive. (A good example of the rarification of locale and character is the frequent use of protagonist or authorial voice in the tone of an anthropological fieldworker, together with the not infrequent interjection of 'actually' (much favoured by Carleton), 'literally' (Lever's usual word), and the intermittent footnote translations of peasant Irish idiom, or, the less frequent footnote exclamation, 'fact!' used by Edgeworth.)

The second main point arises from the use of the word 'effort'. Nobody, I believe, would want to claim that the works of any nineteenth century Irish writer were artistic wholes, masterpieces of aesthetic balance and proportion: 'it would be foolish to make exaggerated claims for the literary tradition represented by Maria Edgeworth, Carleton...Lever.'⁵⁷ The one controversial case here is Edgeworth's Castle Rackrent, which according to one critic is 'almost a perfect work of art,'⁵⁸ a judgement which another brusquely repudiated.⁵⁹ Whatever the merits of Castle Rackrent's case (and I believe its uniqueness is not to be understood as synonymous with excellence), it is an exception in stimulating such a debate. It is not the least of the paradoxes of the whole

question of nineteenth century Irish fiction that its inaugural work sets a tone which is neither developed or reproduced in subsequent works, and that as an inaugural work, its concern is with a past and the disabuse of its pretensions. The word 'effort' then is used to draw attention to the essentially embryonic nature of the fiction. For all its aesthetic blemishes, it represents a frenetic experimentation with superannuated (for the most part, Castle Rackrent always excepted) fictional modes, in itself an indication of artistic endeavour and cultural insecurity. The embryonic nature of the fiction is matched by the embryonic nature of the idea of cultural reconciliation, exemplified by Ferguson and Davis, for example, an idea which the experience of the Famine seems to have powerfully overshadowed.

A third point about the theme of identity and community is that it suggests a link between Edgworth, Carleton and Lever with one of the main preoccupations of contemporary European fiction, one shared by writers as different from one another as Jane Austen and Tolstoy, both of whom in major works (for example, Emma and Anna Karenina) depict characters who finally attain a well-founded sense of their identity through their negotiation of the problematical demands of their respective communal contexts (I refer to Austen's eponymous heroine and Tolstoy's Konstantin Levin). Moreover, the theme recurs in writers whose concerns and artistry are otherwise very different, such as Balzac, Turgenev and George Eliot.

However, the trio of writers concerning us, not only deals with the question of how identity and community might conceivably interrelate. They also produced an answer to it. This proposal of an answer implies an antinomy or a disequilibrium, between the

two terms, which is acknowledged only to be ultimately overridden. It is their insistence on an answer, a concerted and wide-ranging attempt to disabuse their material of its problematical character, which distinguishes these Irish novelists from their more mature counterparts. In view of which, a modification seems necessary to the formulation already cited, that 'The English novelist was concerned with social choice and personal morality ... But to the Irish novelist these were subordinated to questions of race, creed and nationality - questions which tend of their nature to limit the range and power of fiction.' The latter assertion does not seem to me to be necessarily true, and if, indeed, the besetting question of Irish fiction is, 'What ish my nation?'⁶⁰ then, as I've suggested, at least three of its exponents projected an answer in terms of an artistic construction of a relationship between identity and community, terms which, for the purposes of this thesis have the following connotations.

I use them as generic terms, the one, identity, pertaining to everything related to the personal-existential realm, while community is intended to cover social and material considerations. In a sense an analogue for these areas is the writer and his material, and undoubtedly there is much evidence that our three writers themselves saw this on a subconscious level. Much of the structural material of the works revolves around educational questions, sometimes in the narrow sense of providing discipline and social credit, more often in the broader sense of leading out the mind of an individual, which entails of course, as well as a sense of venturesomeness and the acquisition of experience for its own sake, a sense of limit-reaching and level-finding. The educational impulse in this sense is an impulse to experiment, to live provisionally.

The selection of these two terms means that both the areas they cover exist, independently as it were, in the novels. The fact that this may be said is itself an expression of a sense of imbalance which all these novels portray, and their method of portrayal is an attempt to override the unevenness. Yet the inescapable fact of its presence imparts to the material a unique dynamic, the nature of which the writers themselves did not adequately appreciate. An example of how the dynamic was not properly availed of is the failure of Maria Edgeworth to pursue the idea of the comedy of dissolution. Both Carleton and Lever attempted to develop this idea but clearly found it much too difficult to sustain, as they did most of their fictional ideas. This sense of imbalance should not, I believe, be described as a reflection of the times, but as a characteristic of the times: it must be emphasised once again that these novels are nothing if not contemporary, that their authors were unable to obtain a perspective that would result in the passive creation known as a reflection.

But the presence of imbalance is not as great as the presence of an urge to reconcile. Imbalance is seldom explored for its own sake; it is, ultimately, explored only to be rejected. It is therefore important to realise that while the term identity is intended to cover such items as birth, parentage, emotional life and suchlike, the main burden of it is consciousness. In other words, for the protagonists (and this is, above all, a literature of protagonists, as the titles of the texts almost invariably indicate) the key concern is finding out, experiencing, and in putting what one has learned to proper, harmonising use. It is therefore absolutely essential, though in practice, repetitive and over-indulgent, that the protagonist suffer

a large number of accidents and reversals, that he be solitary and in some sense foreign, or uprooted.

Community means life outside the protagonist. It is different from him, based on different premises, and for that very reason creates an antinomy. Community is chosen as a term because it suggests a smaller social unit than society. In an Irish context this choice of illustrative term hardly needs an explanation, since, as noted, there was no Irish society in the nineteenth century, at least not in a contemporary sense (it might well be argued that the idea of society is one which has only taken hold of the Irish consciousness in the last fifty-odd years). But on the numerous occasions that the Irish novel strays abroad, to London for example (in The Absentee) or to Baden (The Daltons), one's social perspective is confined to the drawing room, the gambling table, the salon - the restrictiveness of which are taken as emblems of the narrowness of 'society', the shallowness of ton. In fact Edgeworth and Lever, both of whom were notable social successes, are very severe on society in their work, and feature their protagonists either making a dignified retreat from it, or being trapped in its toils. If anything its duplicities are more unnerving and have a more corroding effect on one's sense of identity than the imbalances of the extra-urban scene, though this fact may be due to a basic indifference to the fictional potential of drawing rooms.

Instead of the usual notation of nineteenth century fictional dynamic, the individual and society, we must look at a rudimentary form of this dynamic, identity and community. There are, in the very rudimentary character of this dynamic, more fundamentally formative issues, pertaining both to the internal mechanics of the fiction and to the lineaments of its vision. However, in

noting that identity and community are in relationship to one another, that each implies the other, and that the relationship is intended to become an harmonious one, what remains is to see how the relationship works and how it does achieve harmony.

A final point has to be made about nineteenth century Irish fiction, concerning the matter of how it is to be read. The pressures which it tries to accommodate were too urgent to admit of the development of artistic norms, and, further, or to put the same point another way, those works which achieve the greatest degree of coherence are those which explicitly refuse to have a clear-cut relationship with their society, and perhaps in their very aversion become more typical of their society than those which don't avert their social gaze, since their preoccupation with their own mechanisms is also a preoccupation with deeper, mythic patterns underlying, and therefore more fundamental to, the social fabric. But even in the act of aversion, the Irish romantic novel reveals a society without a focus. At any rate, escapism is a strong motif in all Irish fiction of the period: Lever's rollicking young heroes, who seem to carry out their exploits with the intention of being found out and brought to book, are the counterparts of Maturin's introspective, tempestuous students from whose inner turmoils little can finally be salvaged.

The novels to be examined below must be read not so much with an eye to their creaky structures or a dismissive sniff at their constant reliance on lost uncles and various other improbable agents of relief and reconciliation. Rather they should be read with a view to what the creakiness and unlikelihoods are caused by, and what in the fiction they serve. Such a reading does not attempt to justify the deficiencies of nineteenth century Irish fiction, but is

based on an assumption that deficiency also has meaning, and that to deny that meaning is to be involved in a contradiction greater than any the nineteenth century Irish novel tries to resolve, namely the effective denial of the existence of these works as works of fiction. One might as well argue that they are defective as historical material because of the stories which obtrude into their documentary content. The 'bad' literature of a culture is very often more illustrative of a culture's mores, expectations and phobias than 'good' literature, which is more likely to radicalise one sense of a culture's props, redesigning its outlook and reorienting its direction.

My aim here is to allow the fiction selected to speak for itself, by being patient with its method of articulation and by identifying with the unique set of circumstances which attended its existence. My objective is no more than to invert the customary approach of looking at the message of nineteenth century Irish authors - a very obvious starting place, indeed, in a literature as message-laden as this, to try to isolate the means by which the message or the vision, of these authors achieves its presence, and further to see the orientation of the vision over roughly two generations of literary production. Finally, I shall briefly attempt to assert the character of nineteenth century Irish fiction - always aware that it is a two-faced character - and to trace the fate of the preoccupation with life on the land in later generations of Irish novelists and story-writers, and to assess the significance of its persistence as a theme.

Critics have generally approached nineteenth century Irish literature conditioned by Yeats possibly to listen to the poetry

and to nod in curt acknowledgement to the existence of the fiction. It is time, I feel, to extend our familiarity with the prose, and to see its concerns as not alien to, or necessarily of a lesser order, than the verse; to reveal the artistic conflicts in the material of three significantly representative writers - noting that the gaps and differences between them are absolutely crucial to our sense of their position and attainments - and approaching them in the spirit of 'the first requirement: a suspension of contempt or condescension.'⁶¹

FOOTNOTES TO INTRODUCTION

- 1 Maria Edgeworth, Castle Rackrent, ed. George Watson (London, Oxford University Press, 1964), p.vii.
- 2 Thomas Flanagan, The Irish Novelists 1800-1850 (New York, Columbia University Press, 1959), p.33.
- 3 For Lever's career in the Victorian literary market place, see J.A. Sutherland, Victorian Novelists and Publishers (London, Athlone Press, 1976), chap. 7.
- 4 Stephen Gwynn, Irish Literature and Drama in the English Language: A Short History (London, Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1936), p.59.
- 5 Daniel Corkery, Synge and Anglo-Irish Literature (Cork, Cork University Press and London, Longmans, Green, 1931), p.16.
- 6 Reference is to Douglas Hyde, A Literary History of Ireland (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 1899) and Thomas MacDonagh, Literature in Ireland (Dublin, The Talbot Press, 1916) respectively.
- 7 Horatio Sheafe Krams, Irish Life in Irish Fiction (New York, Columbia University Press, 1903), p.v.
- 8 Seán O Faoláin, Vive Moi! (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1965), p.243.
- 9 These articles are collected and edited by John P. Frayne, Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats Vol.1 (London, Macmillan, 1970).
- 10 W.B. Yeats, review of The Life of William Carleton 'Bookman', March 1896. Frayne, op.cit., p.396.
- 11 Review of Yeats's own Stories from Carleton and Carleton's The Red-Haired Man's Wife, 'Scots Observer', Oct. 19, 1889, attributed by Frayne to Yeats. Frayne, op.cit., p.143.
- 12 *ibid.*
- 13 Frayne, op.cit., p.145.
- 14 As for example in a letter to the editor of the Dublin 'Daily Express', published Feb. 27, 1895, reprinted in Allan Wade (ed.) The Letters of W.B. Yeats (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954) pp.246-251.
- 15 In the letter cited, n.14; see also Frayne, op.cit., pp.355-6 383-7.
- 16 Wade, op.cit., p.248.

- 17 Flanagan, op.cit., p.35.
- 18 R. Dudley Edwards and T. Desmond Williams (eds.), The Great Famine (Dublin, Browne and Nolan, 1956), p.vii.
- 19 The remark is Thomas Drummond's, Under-Secretary in Ireland, 1835-40; quoted in Terence de Vere White, The Anglo-Irish (London, Gollancz, 1972), p.121.
- 20 Further information on the societies may be had in Galen Broeker, Rural Disorder and Police Reform in Ireland, 1812-36 (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970); T. Desmond Williams (ed.), Secret Societies in Ireland (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1973); Thomas N. Brown, 'Nationalism and the Irish Peasant, 1800-1848', The Review of Politics Vol.15, No. 4 (Oct. 1953), pp.403-445; K.B. Nowlan, 'Agrarian Unrest in Ireland, 1800-1845', University Review Vol.11, No.6 (1959), pp.7-16.
- 21 Seán O Faoláin, King of the Beggars (London, Nelson, 1938).
- 22 Daniel Corkery, The Fortunes of the Irish Language (Cork, The Mercier Press, 1968), p.113.
- 23 ibid.
- 24 ibid.
- 25 ibid.
- 26 F.S.L. Lyons, Ireland Since the Famine. (London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1971), pp.96-7.
- 27 For an argument to the contrary, see Irene Bostrom, 'The Novel and Catholic Emancipation', Studies in Romanticism Vol.2 (1962-3), pp.155-176.
- 28 Charles Lever, The Knight of Gwynne: A Tale of the Time of the Union (London, Chapman & Hall, 1847). Quoted from Vol.X of the Copyright Edition of Lever's works (London, Downey, 37 vols., 1897-9), p.437.
- 29 Maurice Craig, Dublin 1660-1860 (Dublin, Allen Figgis, 1969), p.174.
- 30 Craig, op.cit., p.202.
- 31 Quoted in Lionel Stevenson, The Wild Irish Girl (London, Chapman & Hall, 1936), p.69.
- 32 Gwynn, op.cit., p.7.
- 33 According to Edward O'Reilly in the Preface to A Chronological Account of Irish Writers and a Descriptive Catalogue of such of their works as are still Extant in Verse or Prose (Dublin, 1820; Shannon, Irish University Press, 1970).

- 34 Corkery, The Fortunes of the Irish Language, p.110.
- 35 ibid.
- 36 Frank O'Connor, The Backward Look (London, Macmillan, 1967), p.130.
- 37 Corkery, op.cit., p.110.
- 38 O'Connor, op.cit., p.130.
- 39 Although Miss Brooke's father is mentioned as one of the Edgeworths' neighbours - Maria Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth (London, 2 vols, 1821), II, p.11 - neither Miss Brooke or her achievement is. (This edition is the second, corrected one.)
- 40 Malcolm Brown, The Politics of Irish Literature (London, George Allen & Unwin, 1972), p.59.
- 41 Samuel Ferguson contributed four articles on Hardiman to the Dublin University Magazine, Vol.3, No.xvi (April 1834), pp.456-478; Vol.4, No.xx (August 1834), pp.152-167; Vol.4, No.xxii (October 1834), pp.447-467; Vol.4, No.xxiii (November, 1834), pp.514-542.
- 42 The Yeats article referred to appeared in the 'Irish Fireside', October 9, 1886. Frayne, op.cit., p.87.
- 43 Brown, op.cit., p.60.
- 44 Geórd O Tuathaigh, Ireland before the Famine (Dublin, Gill and Macmillan, 1972), p.187.
- 45 For evidence of this interest see the following articles by John Hennig, 'Contes Irlandais', Modern Language Review Vol.42 (1947) pp.237-242 and 'Jean Paul and Ireland', Modern Language Review Vol.40 (1945) pp.190-196; also R. Bolster, 'French Romanticism and the Ireland Myth', Hermathena Vol.99 (1964), pp.42-48.
- 46 Flanagan, op.cit., p.137.
- 47 Charles Maturin, Melmoth the Wanderer (London and Edinburgh, 1820; Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1977), p.38.
- 48 For example, his remark in the Preface to Women, or Pour et Contre (1818) that his fiction 'seems to want reality, vraisemblance: the characters, situations and language are drawn merely from imagination...'; and his admission in a letter to Sir Walter Scott: 'I have no power of affecting, no hope of instructing...'

Both these statements are quoted in George L. Barnett (ed.), Nineteenth Century British Novelists on the Novel (New York, Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1971), p.10.

- 49 This claim is argued in H.W. Piper and A. Norman Jeffares, 'Maturin the Innovator', Huntingdon Library Quarterly Vol.21, No.3 (May, 1958) pp.261-284.
- 50 Flanagan, op.cit., p.170.
- 51 In the General Preface to the Waverley Novels, 1829, reprinted in Waverley (Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1972). Reference is to pp.523-4 of that edition.
- 52 By Mark D. Hawthorne, John and Michael Eanim (The 'O'Hara Brothers'):
A Study in the Early Development of the Anglo-Irish Novel
(Salzburg, Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1975).
- 53 See Charles Gavan Duffy, My Life in Two Hemispheres (Shannon, Irish University Press, 2 vols, 1968), Vol.I: p.91n.
- 54 Gwynn, op.cit., p.66.
- 55 Charles Lever, The O'Donoghue (Copyright ed., Vol.VIII, p.xv.)
- 56 By A. Norman Jeffares, 'Maria Edgeworth's Ormond', English Vol.18, No.102 (Autumn, 1969), p.86.
- 57 'Preface' of R.B. McDowell (ed.), Social Life in Ireland 1800-45 (Cork, The Mercier Press, 1957), p.8.
- 58 Flanagan, op.cit., p.69.
- 59 'I find it impossible to follow him', O'Connor, op.cit., p.127.
- 60 Flanagan, op.cit., p.3, quoting Shakespeare, Henry V.
- 61 Patric Rafroidi, 'The Uses of Irish Myth in the Nineteenth Century', Studies Vol.62 (1973), p.251.

CHAPTER I

MARIA EDGEWORTH

1 Introduction

Maria Edgeworth made significant contributions to three fictional areas: children's stories, society novels and regional literature. Though these areas seem quite distinct from each other, there are, in Edgeworth's career, important links between them. It would be incorrect to say that one area begot another, since for most of her writing life she continued to contribute to all three. Nevertheless, it is reasonable to suggest that one area influenced another. In fact it is tempting to see her graduation from nursery to drawing-room to Irish castle as merely a change of setting, with no change of corresponding magnitude in artistic concern. Such a view gains some support from the fact that all her work - with the noteworthy exceptions of pieces with first-person narrators - has the tone of some of her earliest productions. These - I have in mind The Parent's Assistant: or stories for children (1796) and Practical Education (1798) written with her father - have the tone of a lively, quite humane, but briskly discipline-conscious teacher. One modern authority has called Practical Education 'the most significant contemporary work on pedagogy.'¹ There's a sense in which all Maria Edgeworth's work may be seen as striving to maintain such a high pedagogical standard.

But to note Edgeworth's didactic strain is merely to repeat a critical commonplace. The neatness which didacticism imparts to incongruent elements in Edgeworth's fiction is very much out of keeping with the nature of the elements themselves. To see the Edgeworth oeuvre as a series of evolutionary steps taken from an

interest in childhood to a preoccupation with nationhood would be to impose upon her output a neatness quite as distorting as that provided by her pedagogical imperative, and nothing like as necessary. The didacticism, though undoubtedly obtrusive, has its significance. The links between Edgeworth's areas of concern are significant also, precisely because they don't have the overtness of didacticism. Instead of seeing each of these areas as the offspring of the others, I see each of them as an extension, and placing under stress, of earlier concerns. I shall explain this view further when dealing with the relationship between the two major areas in Edgeworth's most productive phase.

This phase I see beginning with the publication of Castle Rackrent (1800), commonly regarded as the first Irish novel, and closing with the appearance together of Harrington and Ormond in 1817, the year of her father's death. Ormond is the last of her Irish novels.² In this period Edgeworth produced all her important fiction with the exception of Helen (1834), arguably her best 'society' novel, though consideration of it falls outside my remit. Despite Helen, however, the years after her father's death were creatively lean compared to those under review, and in the view of most critics her productive years are made all the more important by her Irish novels. It is revealing that after 'two years of doubt and extreme anxiety',³ spent completing her late father's Memoirs (1820; Maria wrote the second of the two volumes), she reverted to producing 'sequels' to her early children's stories, a decision which makes Helen seem a new departure. The 1820s and '30s saw Maria Edgeworth running the family estate, being lionised in the best English society and generally, 'as a private woman...realis[ing] herself more fully.'⁴ Yet this intensification of experience produced

little or no literature. Clearly there may be many reasons for this decline, and the novelist herself was well aware of them, as we shall discuss in the concluding remarks. But since the decline dates from the death of her father, it may be thought that his presence was one of the elements vital to her career.

One of the most vexed questions in dealing with Maria Edgeworth's writing career concerns the degree of her father's influence on it. As my interests are primarily neither textual, or biographical, I leave the matter of evidence of collaboration, of strict parental supervision and related topics to others.⁵ Richard Lovell Edgeworth undoubtedly influenced his daughter's writing. But it is by no means clear that 'she wrote chiefly to please him.'⁶ And to my mind it is a mere repetition of the fault of which Richard Lovell Edgeworth is being accused to write of him, 'life, death, education, love and literature came up for his inspection and proved to be problems of no greater difficulty than had been the invention of the one-wheel coach.'⁷ Such powers of crass rationalisation as the novelist's father is here credited with seem a poor basis for the experimental method of scientific research with which Edgeworth, together with leading scientists of his day, was involved. (With such figures as Erasmus Darwin and Joseph Priestley, he was a member of the Birmingham Lunar Society.) As to his literary influence, his daughter's remark is sufficient:

In fact, my father never exerted himself to write, or thought of becoming an author, till he felt sufficient motive, in the wish to encourage and assist me to finish "Practical Education". All his literary ambition then and ever was for me.⁸

A modern critic has written: 'If censure is merited, we are more accurate in condemning Miss Edgeworth for her implicit faith in her

father's precepts and teachings...than in ridiculing Mr. Edgeworth.⁹

The nature of Richard Lovell Edgeworth's influence on his daughter's work may be most profitably assessed in terms of its intellectual characteristics. One of the most impressive and innovating aspects of Practical Education is, it has been shown, its emphasis on the practical.¹⁰ I am not going to argue that Maria Edgeworth was an experimental novelist. Certainly her work - and that of Carleton and Lever - is based upon contradiction, discontinuity and ostensibly irreconcilable opposites. But neither she nor her fellow authors represented those features for their own sake. They characteristically offset the force of such Modernistic material by didacticism, editorialising, or compulsive manipulation of the reader's sense of probability. Such tactics should not be regarded as evasions, but rather as absolutely essential ingredients of the fiction which all three authors wanted to create.

The influence of the experimentalist spirit can be assessed in two ways. First of all, it enables us to see Maria Edgeworth as a writer for, and of, her own age, not one for all time. Linked by her father's intellectual interests - which included adherence to Rousseau as well as contact with scientific circles - to the vanguard of contemporary social thought, she was immune from, though not unaware of, the cult of sensibility which infected the literature of the day. Such a link caused her to conceive of fiction on an intellectual basis. For this reason, her novels are to be assessed as romans à thèse. Her characters have a moral bearing and are affected by prevailing ideological currents. She deliberately substantiates picturesque material with gleanings from documentary sources and anthropological fieldwork, and tends to view fiction as a consolidation and ratification of such findings in a

different mode, in other words on a different - more diagrammatic and, conceivably, more experimental - plane of intellection. Her account of her father's editorial advice seems to confirm this experimental approach:

Whenever I thought of writing any thing, I always told him my first rough plans; and always, with the instinct of a good critic, he used to fix immediately upon that, which would best answer the purpose. - "Sketch that, and shew it to me" - These words, from the experience of his sagacity, never failed to inspire me with hope of success. It was then sketched. Sometimes, when I was fond of a particular part, I used to dilate on it in the sketch; but to this he always objected - "I don't want any of your paintings - none of your drapery! I can imagine all that - let me see the bare skeleton."¹¹

And indeed she asserted (after her father's death) that 'literary and scientific invention should be on the same principles.'¹²

But as well as adhering to a supposedly scientific model of finding out - and one assumes that the scientific model was invoked not only because of Richard Lovell Edgeworth but because it emphasised the primacy of objective data and the impulse to apprehend it intellectually - finding out in itself, by trial and error, is the basis of virtually all Edgeworth's fiction. (The only possible exception is Castle Rackrent, her first novel (and written without consulting her father), but that novel comes to us so bound up with editorial material that no reader is left in doubt of its being a text to learn from, not to identify with.) Though it is too schematic a generalisation to declare 'her favourite theme [was] the regeneration of young men when they return from cold and formal England to Irish warmth and reality,'¹³ her fiction is certainly concerned with the exposure of young men and women to the jeopardy of unknowing: installing them in a terra incognita (Ireland is the most obvious example); occasioning them the loss of their parents - either through death, which invariably takes

place 'off-stage', or through alienation; subjecting them to a reversal of fortune which is only really made good by their own efforts. Their own efforts are given context and detail - nowhere more attentively than in the Irish novels - but in all cases what's learned and how are the overriding considerations. This faith in the processes of intellection is one of the most important distinguishing features of Edgeworth's fiction. By faith I mean that it is a feature of the fiction which Edgeworth herself doesn't examine. Rather she asserts that despite bad influences, the arbitrariness of fortune, contradictory impulses, detours and distractions, her protagonist will usually win through. (On the odd occasion when the protagonist doesn't learn from or adapt to beneficial influence - for example, 'To-Morrow'¹⁴ and 'Almeria'¹⁵ - the loss of standing is complete and catastrophic.)

Winning through is represented as a type of wholeness, attained both by the successful negotiation of the vicissitudes of social existence and the acceptance of the necessities of one's own nature. Wholeness is achieved when these two dimensions dovetail, when the protagonist is equal to his social responsibilities, from the automatic realisation of which the whims of an indulgence-seeking ego have distracted him. But Edgeworth invariably presents her vision of wholeness as a condition her protagonists should arrive at, not possess and act upon. In her work we see the infancy of the hero, not his manhood, which is perhaps as it should be, bearing in mind that she gave birth to the Irish novel. On the other hand, despite her abiding interest in the assertion of wholeness - despite indeed her all too evident insistence on the conceptual force of that term - she is drawn not so much to an

exemplification of it, but to a series of increasingly detailed exposés of the factors which may inhibit its attainment. Accident, selfishness, a painfully acute awareness of how different one person is from another, the difficulties of presenting oneself in public - these and related themes are the bases of Edgeworth's fiction, and recur with such consistency, in moral tale or three-volume production, that one feels here is the syntax of experience which only a faith in its opposite, didactically asserted, could smother.

If, in Edgeworth's fiction, 'the precept really was the starting point',¹⁶ it must be noted that the interest of the fiction lies in the representation of the precept under stress. Edgeworth represents the force of a given precept by showing the insufficiency of the distractions which attempt to undermine or devalue it. This insufficiency derives from the very fact of the distractions' number and variety, usually depicted in accounts of large social gatherings, one of the chief characteristics of which is a babel of voices indulging in either pretentious distortions of language or hollow repartee. (It is not the least of Edgeworth's characteristics that her protagonists are seldom at a loss for adequate words.) Sometimes we find the precept embodied in the protagonist, sometimes in the protagonist's mentor, a character acting in loco parentis. (In marked contrast to the early Moral Tales and Popular Tales, virtually all the novels feature protagonists divorced from a family context.) In either case the steadfastness of the precept-bearer is in conflict with the waywardness of the other, and out of this conflict the life of the fiction is created. Perhaps conflict is too strong a term to use here; in too many of the cases the precept-bearer's capacity to absorb his or her opposite's random

energies smothers every vestige of drama. My purpose in offering this very schematic account of a central Edgeworth strategy is to stress that the assertion of a precept, and the belief in the efficiency of such an assertion is not the result of strident homilies,¹⁷ but is a function of relatedness.

The relationship between the straight and narrow and the primrose path may not be a dramatically dynamic one in Edgeworth's fiction, but a tension between them is invariably thought to be inevitable. Neither is the relationship, so to speak, inevitably genetic, but is generally seen as intimate; that is, its typical enactment takes place in an intimate, usually domestic, setting. Thus it takes into account the conditions in which the antagonists (mentor and charge) face each other, as well as the various acts of confrontation themselves, acts which have a cumulative effect not only because they conform to the principles of associationism which were central to the intellectual outlook of Edgeworth père et fille¹⁸ but because their impact on the setting itself is immediately discernible. The standing of an Edgeworth character, whether precept-bearing or not, is inseparable from the viability of his context, and is mediated by it. Matters of self-establishment cannot be discussed without reference to establishment in general. Deciding on the role and value of, for example, a ward in a household is a means of assessing that individual's place in society. Indeed the increasing use made of wards and orphans in the later fiction suggests that Edgeworth was interested both in the introduction to an establishment of a novel additional element, one untrammelled by its norms, and in the untrammelled element itself, a scenario which may be said to incorporate economically the twin forces

of discontinuity and (potential) resilience. Moreover, it is interesting to note that the final assessment of that individual's place in society (and one wonders if Edgeworth considered a particular character an individual precisely because he or she is an outsider - orphan or ward) is presented as the setting up of an establishment of his own, usually by means of marriage, itself the most common symbol of wholeness.

Nowhere are these preoccupations more in evidence than in Edgeworth's Irish novels, and there they receive their most lucid clarification under the themes of identity and community, the enactment of relationship between which possesses more vitality and is required to be more crucial than it is elsewhere. Not only are Edgeworth's Irish novels major events in Irish fiction, they also represent the fullest extent of her talent, and in doing so make explicit its concerns and orientations. Before I discuss the novels in question - Castle Rackrent (1800), Ennui (1809), The Absentee (1812) and Ormond (1817)¹⁹ - I shall consider them in relation to the other novels of Edgeworth's major period, with a view to assessing their debt to those novels and their distinctness as a quartet from them. These four novels will best reveal themselves if seen as being necessarily related to but separate from their fellows. From a thematic point of view this may seem no more than a statement of the obvious, but I will show that there are other than thematic issues to be considered. Thirdly, having discussed the four novels, I shall discuss the implications for Carleton and Lever of Edgeworth's vision in them.

2 The Irish Novels in the Edgeworth oeuvre

Despite unanimous critical acclaim for the 'quite new use of the "national" element',²⁰ which Edgeworth introduced to fiction

in her Irish novels, these works are not radically different in concept from her other works, particularly those novels of what we have called her major phase, which, incidentally, begins and ends with an Irish novel. Disharmony is depicted in terms of unsettled domestic life - unsuccessful and issueless marriages being one of the chief characteristics of the Rackrent dynasty. The protagonist is either denied the benefit of parental guidance - the eponymous hero of Ormond is an orphan; or he rejects his parents' gimcrack values, as Lord Colambre does in The Absentee, thanks in part to his Cambridge education; or he is misled by parental example, as we find in the case of Lord Glenthorn in Ennui when reflecting on his own relations with Ireland recalls that his father 'had a dislike of that country, and I grew up in his prejudices.' [IV, 215]. Mentors are also available to the Irish protagonists, though their influence, while naturally crucial, is less obtrusive than in some of the other works. It might be argued that the absence of a mentor is one of the reasons the Rackrent family goes from bad to worse, but how his influence could be structured in that novel is hard to see, since the central character, the narrator Thady, is not by any means a protagonist and the book itself, unlike every other Edgeworth novel, is an essay not in doing but in undoing. A final point of structural similarity is the Irish novels' reliance on precept. The editorial apparatus accompanying Castle Rackrent leaves us in no doubt of that novel's message. To ensure that Ennui made its point, the novelist's father prefaced it with the following note:

The causes, curses and cure of this disease are exemplified, I hope, in such a manner as not to make the remedy worse than the disease. Thiebauld tells us, that the prize-essay on Ennui was read to the Academy of Berlin which put all the judges to sleep. [211-2]

The alliteration and reference to Thiebauld reveal the man, no doubt, but not quite so much as the main verb in the first sentence. In the case of The Absentee the prefatory note is longer and more sternly explicit. I quote its opening sentence:

The Absentee is not intended as a censure upon those whose duties, and employments, and superior talents lead them to the capital; but to warn the thoughtless and the unoccupied from seeking distinction by frivolous imitation of fashion and ruinous waste of fortune.²¹

These two works represent the Irish interest in the first and second series of Tales of Fashionable Life respectively. The aim of both sets of tales, Richard Lovell Edgeworth informs us, is 'to point out some of those errors to which the higher classes of society are disposed' [IV, 211]. This, he notes, distinguishes them from the children's stories, though the general orientation remains the same: 'to promote, by all her writings, the progress of education from the cradle to the grave' (ibid). The two Irish tales are part of the overall enterprise, and a prefatory note is provided for each of the companion pieces, though these are all less substantial than either Ennui or The Absentee. The national element, to which neither note refers, would thus seem to be incidental to the main purpose, selected not for its own sake - or indeed apprehended as a national element - but because it helps substantiate the pedagogic imperative. How it does so is our next question.

One of the advantages of using wards, orphans and domestically alienated central characters is that it places them in an unsettled and, as a result, according to Edgeworth, an investigative relationship with those ostensibly more established than themselves. Through them we find out how the established occupy their position, their codes of conduct and, most importantly from the point of view

of the fiction's dramatic content, their offences against and lapses from this code. In a precise sense, the protagonists of Edgeworth's novels (though entitled tales, Ennui and The Absentee both have the dimensions of the novel) have a critical relationship with their context. It is not only the Tales of Fashionable Life which map out a critique of the types of social behaviour common to the smart set. Despite a gap of over thirty years between Belinda and Helen, the fate of the fashionable is the central pre-occupation of both works, as it is in Castle Rackrent and Ormond.

The critique of context embodied by Edgeworth's protagonists may be described as an investigation into the adequacy of prevailing norms of behaviour in public. In Belinda, Lady Delacour - 'one of the great achievements in English fiction'²² - oscillates between disease-induced anxiety at home and brilliantly stylish behaviour in public. The novel proceeds to show that somewhat pedestrian consistency is more true to a sense of one's real self than enforced masquerades with their resultant tension and exhaustion. Behind a striking mask of composure worn in public by Lady Delacour lies neglect of family life, the emotional squalor of a spoiled marriage and decay (her disease is a cancer in the breast). The main characteristic of prevailing social norms is the false style which has to be adopted in order to participate in the life of society, society here being defined by the pages of Debrett. The falsity of the style chiefly lies in its impersonality, which can be most readily seen from the conversational manner of the principals, the strongest features of which are the riposte, the rebuttal and the apothegm. Such conversational strategies are designed less to engage constructively with one's collocutor, to find some common interest, than to refute his presence and thereby consolidate one's own.

In these novels information is invariably conveyed by the author herself. Otherwise, imparting information becomes an explicitly non-public affair, requiring tactics such as special messengers with personal missives, accidentally-discovered account books, and a use of the locked-door/secret chest syndrome.

The tension of the conversational exchanges, the trial of strength to hold one's ground implicit in them, together with the idea of information (the basis of knowledge, essential to the formation of adequate judgements) are the elements in Edgeworth's view of social behaviour, and may be gathered under one heading: irresponsibility. This view is enlarged upon in the themes which derive from it: misguidance, competitiveness, waste, disequilibrium, meretriciousness. The result of the critical relationship which the protagonists have to their context is that he (or in the case of the non-Irish novels, usually, she) embodies a golden mean. The character whose standing is ostensibly not normalised is the character whose standing is most sure-footed. Belinda is instrumental in regularising Lady Delacour's vain and tempestuous passage from private anguish to public glamour and back again.

I referred to the non-Irish novels partly to introduce my remarks on the Irish novels themselves, but also to draw attention to the curious lack of colour from which the fashionable context suffers. Its characteristics reveal Edgeworth's sense of the social world's endemic irresponsibility, but they also reveal that world's narrowness. There is no constituency of interest in these works comparable to that provided by the peasantry in the Irish novel. Travel is a bland experience in the Home Counties in Helen, for example, whereas in an Irish context it is not only a challenge in

its own right, but a means of extending and enriching one's sense of locale, and for the protagonist it offers a very immediate means of recognising his foreignness. The typical settings in the non-Irish works are foyers, carriages, drawing-rooms, salons and theatre boxes - arenas which in their strict physical delimitation may be seen as illustrative of the small room for manoeuvre allowed by the codes which are being exercised within their confines. These settings, which are usually not particularised by detail, seem stagey, which is probably inevitable in the work of a writer dedicated to drawing diagrams of moral forces. In addition, when a physical detail is brought to our attention it generally turns out to have a disproportionate influence on character and events. It is very much part of Edgeworth's method that everything contributes to her overriding thesis, every detail is freighted with associational potential. But this indicates a necessarily constricted view of environment. Whoever successfully denies the inescapably instructive nature of his context is lost indeed.²³

The young ladies of the non-Irish novels take issue with the shallow standards of their milieu, but lack the wherewithal to create an alternative. Their course is to remain true to themselves, to be mortified and confused by triviality but never to succumb to it, to assert their moral integrity by example. In addition to possessing these virtues, in some cases latently, the young men of the Irish novels possess the means of acting upon their alienation. Their removal from the haunts of the vapid implies accentuation of a different moral area of themselves, whether they initially realise it or not. Ireland is a foreign country to them in a number of ways. They confront this foreignness alone, and have to prove themselves worthy of a mentor, who does, however, obligingly materialise. (I use

'foreign' to denote the non-fashionable, in order to associate Harry Ormond with these remarks, his case being not quite the same as Lord Glenthorn's or Lord Calambre's.)

The chief manifestation of foreignness is the peasantry, as is obvious from their mode of speech - undisciplined, asseverative and intimate. Nothing could be more different from the mannered, coldblooded and brusque style to which our heroes are accustomed. Ireland then, in the sense of a hinterland behind the façades and charades of fashion, is an alternative presence, accessible but somewhat inscrutable, a dimension which hasn't been conventionalised and hence must be experienced more vitally. It is a country, with all the latitude and variety and idiosyncrasy of details that that implies, rather than a clique with its characteristics of restriction, uniformity and blandness of detail. Ireland is a new beginning, an antidote to metropolitanism, and in its own semi-socialised condition offers the young newcomer a curious corollary to his own not quite formed sense of himself or his position.

In saying that Ireland must be experienced more vitally, I mean that the resources of fashionable society are of little avail to those who live there. Not only is the country an alternative to the salon, but the Irish novels contain more acutely parodic accounts of the snares and delusions of social pretensions. The critique of men and manners which was Edgeworth's overriding artistic objective is intensified in her Irish work. But intensification of attack is also an intensification of concern. The issues in the Irish novels are more profound, or at least have wider implications, than those in their companion pieces. The young ladies of the non-Irish works tend to come to terms with their situation by assuming responsibility for it. The problematic of their stories is how to make their context accommodate their sense of responsibility. The

young men of the Irish novels represent an important attenuation of this approach. Whether they realise it or not - and with the exception of Lord Colambre they don't - responsibility has been conferred on them. The problematic of their (much more adventurous) stories is how to create a setting which will be an articulation of this responsibility. In other words, the emphasis in the Irish novels is on two vitally related questions, the realisation of oneself and the achievement of a self-authorized context - the bringing about, in fact, of a local habitation and a name.

If issues are much larger in the Irish novels, the sense of jeopardy is also much greater. In forsaking the well-upholstered drawing room for the dilapidated rural retreat, the protagonist is willy-nilly abandoning the availability of props. He is confronting his foreign action of breaking rank, of exchanging one realm of experience for another. Such an exchange brings about not only an examination of the norms of his original realm but also challenges the meaning of those norms to him, throwing him back on his own resources, creating conditions for self-appraisal, and reinforcing the sense that in choosing to remove from accustomed haunts he has placed himself in a potentially creative situation. One of the ways Edgeworth draws attention to the new situation's creative potential is to stress the novelty of the information the foreigner receives. Such an emphasis underlines the learning possibilities provided by the new locale, and made available by having exchanged into it. (Though there are sound reasons for the protagonists' leaving 'society', they do leave voluntarily.) But what might be called the epistemological novelty of the new locale only achieves its full value when the protagonist realises foreignness - both his own and the locale's - as potentiality. Once that recognition is made the stage

is set for an harmonious conclusion; that is, for a consolidation of the possibilities recognised, which, as I mentioned before, is an acceptance of the complexities entailed by recognition.

The role of the peasantry is crucial to this moment of realisation. (It has two other fundamental elements. One is its very momentariness, on which its dramatic impact depends. The other is that the moment achieves decisiveness because it's the juncture at which a secret is unveiled, an unsuspected fact revealed, a suspicion confirmed.) It's been said that 'The peasantry was important to her...because, ultimately, it was through them that she came to understand the fate of her own class.'²⁴ In fact the peasantry is not only implicated in, but also collaborates with, the destiny of the young men, being instrumental in bringing about recognition - sometimes improbably so: '"Could it be - could it possibly be Moriarty Carroll, on the Pont Neuf in Paris?"' Harry Ormond exclaims (IX, 501); so does the reader. It is the drawing together of two foreign elements which provides the basis for a new man, a new model of order, the restoration of the house, the reinstallation of the family, and the presumed abolition of socially deforming practices.

The above account of Edgeworth's adult fiction and the place of her Irish novels in it is very general. I am aware of having done nothing more than noted the presence of mentors, for example. Minor details carry such a lot of weight that anything but a synoptic view of themes, motifs and strategies would have necessitated exhaustive unpicking of one or more novels. Such a necessity I hope to obviate also in the more detailed discussion of the Irish novels which now follows. I shall consider the novels as a group

first of all and examine links between them. Then I shall examine each of the novels in chronological order, analysing the scenes in each novel which I consider central to the theme of identity and community; or, in other words how Maria Edgeworth removed the question mark which she saw overshadowing the thought of life on the land.

3 Maria Edgeworth's Irish Novels

It will be noted that Castle Rackrent, unanimously acclaimed as Edgeworth's greatest contribution to fiction, received little attention in the preceding remarks, and indeed may be considered as the main reason why her Irish novels cannot be thought of as a group from any other than a thematic point of view. Of its uniqueness there is no doubt. It is the first regional novel, the first Irish novel deserving of the name, a work which inspired Scott, held in high critical regard for its vitality and economy, though its didacticism is often overlooked. The following evaluation is representative of the consensus view:

Castle Rackrent stands upon an entirely different footing from any of Miss Edgeworth's writings. In it alone we find her regarding life - not from any utilitarian, ethical or dogmatic standpoint - but simply and solely objectively, as it strikes, and as it ought to strike, an artist. So far from any cut-and-dried code of morals being enforced in it, morals of every sort are even startlingly absent.²⁵

Yet even this misreading stresses the novel's uniqueness in the Edgeworth canon. It is her only work featuring a peasant narrator, it explicitly avails of historical perspective (whereas Ormond, for example, merely implies one), it is her most sustained performance in peasant idiom and her most resourceful use of first-person narration. In addition, the central character (and, significantly, the novel's one enduring presence), the narrator Thady M'Quirk, is drawn from life,²⁶ which was not one of Edgeworth's usual fictional

practices. Given these artistic achievements, it may seem that her other Irish novels are regrettable lapses. In fact, if we bear in mind the author's own intentions they can only be seen as advances. Castle Rackrent is both an envoi and a preamble. It is indeed a paradox that Edgeworth's best-known novel should occupy a rather eccentric place in her oeuvre. And it is a paradox that it should usher in a new phase of Irish literature by depicting the lapsing of a phase, that a creative achievement be based not on a sense of bringing into being but on a sense of deterioration and terminus. The work is aware of this second set of paradoxes, finds a voice that allows them to be creatively exploited, and finally attempts to overrule them by confining them to a bygone age. The attempt to resolve, to premise an even keel, to influence by example, though here only questionably part of the fictional structure (in the figure of Thady's opportunist son, Jason: he fleeces the last of the Rackrents), is very much part of the fictional intent, gives this novel its true Edgeworthian stamp.

Moreover, it has two more of Edgeworth's central preoccupations and makes the link between them explicit. The preoccupations are with fashionable life and consciousness, or at least the specific nuance which Edgeworth gives to consciousness, namely knowing the right thing to do, or having it within one to do the right thing when the occasion arises. (There are various gradations of the consciousness characterised by Edgeworth in these general terms which, taken in turn, make up a hero's rite de passage. Castle Rackrent doesn't have a hero, nor does anyone in the novel possess a consciousness adequate to the situation.) But Castle Rackrent embodies Edgeworth's most devastating critique of fashionable life, of mindless social striving, of the neglect of community and misplaced

sense of identity such pursuits entail. There is an absence of any countervailing mental energy with which to oppose, contain and stabilise the Rackrents' feckless, hyperactive, childishy obsessional indulgence of their acquisitive material instincts. It has been argued that, in the course of the novel, Thady 'does learn or at least has learning thrust upon him.'²⁷ But even accepting that, his is not an enabling consciousness, as he perhaps suggests in his closing sentence:

As for all I have here set down from memory and hearsay of the family, there's nothing but truth in it from beginning to end, that you may depend upon, for where's the use of telling lies about the things which everybody knows as well as I do? [IV, 63]

Thady is no hero, and his narrative ends not on a high note - Jason, the inheritor, is hardly an improvement on the Rackrents - but in a tone which plays down its novelty, which apparently desires to normalise it, as if signalling his experience's impersonal grip and depersonalising effect.

In Castle Rackrent the critique of fashionable society is implied by the connection made between pursuit of its freaks and fads and the resultant abuse of every manifestation of social structure - the house, family, marriage, politics and the law. To repair the damage caused by such reckless squandering of energy and resource it is necessary deliberately to acquire a sense of self-possession and to implement such an acquisition not only in personal terms (by, for example, restoring the house) but also in social terms, by identifying with some objectively accredited social good. The heroes in the later Irish novels attain this status by making their critique the basis of a new order, by channelling their energies in ways unheeded by the Rackrents, in learning from experience and thereby winning through and making good. If the Irish novels are

a more concentrated account of the implications arising from Edgeworth's overall fictional vision, Castle Rackrent may be regarded as performing a similar function within the corpus of her Irish works.

The mapping out of means whereby consciousness of a relationship between identity and community may be recognised (a relationship denied by the Rackrent family) is the concern of Edgeworth's post-Rackrent Irish novels. In all three works the mapping instruments are standard, but the terrain in each case is slightly different. Lord Glenthorn has more uphill work to do. Indeed his neglect of himself and his responsibilities are reminiscent of Sir Kit Rackrent's Bath career. Colambre, on the other hand, is a judicious, self-aware young man, but has to struggle to remain intact when swept along by the momentum and variety of his Irish experience. Harry Ormond also has to regulate energy, in this case his own. I don't mean to suggest that Edgeworth's Irish novels can be said to comprise an evolutionary chain. Nevertheless, as I shall point out more fully below, viewing them in relation to one another, which is permissible by virtue of their being variations on a theme, is quite illuminating. But I begin my detailed account of the relationship between identity and community in Edgeworth's Irish novels by considering the failures in the relationship depicted in Castle Rackrent.

(i) Castle Rackrent

The work implies a relationship between identity and community by showing how the relationship fails to obtain. Each member of the family is preoccupied with the problem of his own identity to the detriment of any corresponding sense of community. Collectively the Rackrents possess a singularly hapless compulsion to make false claims on the reality they have been invited to

inhabit. In order to assert their identity they have to evade or distort its foundation in actuality. This results in the decay of the house, the most obvious case of a failure to establish themselves. But the repercussions on their sense of identity itself are no less ruinous. And these effects are not confined to the Rackrents, but leave their mark on everyone involved in their efforts at establishment. Apart from Thady, who is as much an accomplice as a victim, the Rackrents manage to blight the lives of their various women-folk. Ruthless pursuit of material means of establishment requires the funnelling of psychic energy into one channel, as we see in the obsessions of Sir Murtagh and Sir Kit. Alternatively, Sir Condyl's failure to discriminate between one outlet of energy and another proves an even more disastrous course. In either case the Rackrents can only identify with their own escapist tendencies, creating by their very possessiveness widespread dispossession.

Their relationship with the community - which in this case means both the estate and its neighbours - is embattled, exploitative or disengaged. Community interests intermittently enter Thady's perception, but due to his loyalty he cannot have an overview of them. As he keeps close to the environs of the family, for the most part, he seems to be related to the community verbally (by his idiom, as well as by an ear for gossip) rather than in any comprehensive sense. Sir Condyl, although Thady stresses that 'he became well acquainted and popular amongst the poor in the neighbourhood early' [IV, 24], has not the means of bringing a latent concern with his dependents to the fore. Having married for money, he has the means to implement change, but not the will. Even without money, Sir Condyl has a lawyer's

training to fall back on, but cannot avail of it, 'being unable to speak in public' [IV, 23]. Aphasia again afflicts him in his parliamentary career, the only outcome of his sojourn in the House being that he is, first and last, 'an easy-hearted man that could disoblige nobody' [IV, 27]. The election itself proves a success thanks to a piece of farcical subterfuge, based on literal-mindedness pushed to a barely tenable extreme. Showing uncharacteristic resourcefulness, Sir Condry makes available baskets of divots from one of his farms which his freeholders can stand on, in order to comply with the legal requirement that the electors not be absentees. (Interestingly, Thady's approval of this tactic seems less than wholehearted. He remarks: 'we gained the day by this piece of honesty.' [IV, 35].)

Though this episode is the most cutting parody of the Rackrents' public relations, as well as being a devastating pun on the question of Sir Condry's public standing, support for him remains available among the peasantry. When word of his imminent eviction by Jason gets around, there is a spontaneous demonstration against the new master, which Sir Condry himself curtails by soft words and whiskey. Thady, attempting to muster financial support among neighbouring landlords to allay his master's condition, meets with nothing like the same response. Sir Condry, attempting to convince himself that he has some status in the community, organises an extremely well-attended wake while still alive, but Thady observes that he 'was rather upon the sad order in the midst of it all, not finding there had been such a great talk about himself after his death as he had always expected to hear' [IV, 53]. And indeed, in the actual event, 'He had but a very poor funeral, after all.' [IV, 62].

Sir Condyl's last words are 'Aye, Sir Condyl has been a fool all this days' (ibid.), and certainly there is a blithe, childlike, good-natured cloudiness about him which is in marked contrast to the intense, manipulative, self-seeking character of Sir Kit and Sir Murtagh. This contrast is revealed in their relationship to the community, and by the fact that in both cases the relationship is singular, pre-determined and attempts to be transformative, while Sir Condyl's is various, unthinking and tends towards stasis. Sir Kit and Sir Murtagh acquire a mechanism to disguise and legitimise their impassioned evasion of their communal responsibility - love of gold and love of litigation respectively. Sir Condyl is incapable of making anything of the support offered him by the community. His aphasia is not only a personal drawback; it also represents a failure to recognise and articulate the nature of that support for what it is. He doesn't identify with it. Rather than offer itself to either Sir Murtagh or Sir Kit, the community finds itself resisting their respective claims on it. Their community relationship results in confrontation and death, the confrontation being the result of their own egotistical and therefore (as Edgeworth seems to argue) necessarily arbitrary designs on it. The two mechanisms of law and money - both tokens of social potential with which Sir Condyl is also equipped - are of no avail when harnessed to anti-social energies. The failure resulting from the employment of these mechanisms is not one of articulation, but a failure of misapplication.

In the case of all three Rackrents, however, the ultimate failure is one of consciousness, deriving from their parodic attempts at self-possession. All three mistake the nature of their reality, because they do not enter into the means it provides of self-realisation. Rather than face the possibility of life on the land

(a life of relatedness), they connive at a life despite the land (a life of dislocation and dispossession, leading to death). But not only do they fail the community, they also fail themselves, as is seen when we consider their marriages.

Marriage, we remind ourselves, is Edgeworth's basic symbol of self-realisation. It is the justification of the house, the translation into a new state, the reconciliation of the self and the other, a compact annulling the past and giving promise of a future. It also draws attention to her characters' personal life, and as such is a means of dwelling on questions of identity. Most Rackrent marriages are failures. (The exception is Sir Murtagh's; his wife, née Skinflint, is as bad as himself.) The Rackrent wives, Lady Kit and Isabella, are more foreign to the responsibilities of life on the land than their husbands are. On the morning after their arrival at the castle, Sir Kit gives his spouse an introductory tour of the immediate environs. In the course of this she makes one faux pas after another, greatly mortifying Sir Kit by her ignorance, culminating with her 'laughing like one out of their right mind' [IV,16] on hearing the name Allyballycarricko'shaughlin. Thady remarks 'I verily believe she laid the corner stone of all her future misfortunes at that very instant' (ibid). But her very foreignness, her exotic diamond cross which Sir Kit covets, represents the direction her husband has decided to take. She is the final objective of his escapist tendencies and in her refusal to provide for his rollicking version of life on the land suffers social annihilation, a fate different only in degree from that of the community as a whole. Sir Kit's decision to deprive his wife of the possibility of regulated, negotiable presence is symptomatic of his overall outlook

and his mode of articulating it. Lady Kit's being out of place in every conceivable sense is expressive of her husband's condition - a condition upon which he insistently attempts to base his own striving for presence.

Sir Condyl's marriage is the reverse of this. Complacently immured with his bottle, he asks for nothing better than not to strive, and in so doing makes himself a tool for the insistences of others. This is clear from the basically passive manner in which he offers himself for public recognition. But social status - though of the ephemeral, fashionable variety - is his wife's sole motivating impulse, and the cause of his ruinous debts. Thady consoles himself with the thought that Isabella is not Jewish, but her silliness and pretensions vaguely alarm him. She is, to put it mildly, emotionally volatile and uses her stagey talent for hysterics and 'tantarums' [IV, 26] to draw Sir Condyl away from the bottle and into the vapid company she keeps at Castle Rackrent. He, of course, is not to be drawn. It might be argued that Isabella desires to socialise her husband, but the alternative she offers is hardly less harmful than the condition it is intended to replace. Again the mistress of the house's condition is indicative of the master's. Sir Condyl, secure in his apathy, indulges Isabella, allows the debts to mount and thus gives Jason his chance to exploit the situation, bidding him 'settle it any how' (ibid). Isabella's superficiality meets its counterpart and justification in Sir Condyl's evasions: he 'hated trouble and could never be brought to hear talk of business... [as] it was hard to find the right time to speak, for in the mornings he was a-bed and in the evenings over his bottle, where no gentleman chuses to be disturbed' (ibid). When Isabella, having been advised by her fashionable friends that bankruptcy is imminent, prepares to leave,

Sir Condy desires her not to, but articulate as he is of his need, he has no power to command and, after a brief struggle, resigns himself to the inevitable. The bankruptcy itself is indicative of his lack of authority, and as already noted describing his response to popular support, confronting his loss does not confer authority upon him.

All the Rackrent wives survive their husbands. In doing so they express the untenability of their relationship with Castle Rackrent, emphasise their foreignness to this primary locale and the mode of relatedness it demands, and also suggest their potential viability in alternative settings, none of which are to be regarded as critically important. Their departure is a fitting accompaniment to the eclipse of their husbands, both eventualities express the loss occasioned by the failure to learn from experience. The departure of Lady Murtagh and Lady Kit is witnessed by Thady out of loyalty to what their presence implied but conspicuously failed to establish. Their going is the final enactment of their dishonourable sojourn, but Thady uses it as a means to renew his faith in the family's honour, thereby - in attempting to gloss over the facts of the case - exposing the vulnerability and misguidedness of that very practice. Thady is too preoccupied with the impending distraint to make much of Isabella's departure, though he notes with approval the 'genteel' [IV, 44] way Sir Condy handles the separation.

Failure of marriage then, is emblematic of failure on a wider scale. An indication of the disequilibrium of the marital relationships themselves is childlessness. Not only does this deny each of the couples the possibility of realising the necessity of precept and good example brought home by the dependence and vulnerability of a child, it also reinforces a sense of each

Rackrent's singularity, the shallowness of his community roots, his installation in the house by virtue of genealogical accident, and the basis of his tradition in randomness. Therefore, when it comes to a sharing of responsibilities for his tenure, an interloper, Jason, is the likeliest candidate. Without the opportunities offered by the family, Jason would have been a functionary in the community, as Thady tells us: 'I thought to make him a priest' [IV, 11], adding immediately, 'but he did better for himself', the emphasis being, we might infer, exclusively on the single, egotistical aspect. Jason is the one character in the narrative who does learn from the example set by the Rackrents. He becomes an agent, reads law, has an excellent eye for the main chance, and above all, perhaps, chooses not to deceive himself about the real state of affairs but rather to identify himself with the practices which give rise to it. In contrast to his father's false consciousness and to that of the family (from which it derives), Jason possesses genuine awareness but can only articulate it in malevolent terms. He can only intensify the undermining processes released by the Rackrent presence. Instead of being a corrective to decadence, Jason is its ultimate expression, failing even to achieve the primary form of relatedness, marriage. Not surprisingly, Thady closes his narrative by noting the confusion that follows the last of the Rackrents, an unedifying legal wrangle between Isabella and Jason about the latter's acquisition of the estate. As on previous occasions when events disquiet him, Thady now declares, 'but I'll say nothing.' [IV, 62]. The family's honour is not the cause of silence here, as it once was. Such considerations no longer obtain, allowing him to reveal directly and pathetically the vulnerability which regard

for the family enabled him to allay: 'it would be folly to be getting myself ill will in my old age' (ibid). Thady has witnessed modulations in the Rackrent manner: change, however, proves too much for him. Jason offers him nothing to live up to.

Far from collaborating with his son, Thady proves to be a major casualty of his machinations. Jason's legal battles are unlikely to reveal 'a fine, aesthetic pointlessness',²⁸ as did Sir Murtagh's. Indeed Thady hardly recognises what his son has become as he witnesses the ousting of Sir Condry: 'I wondered, for the life of me, how he could harden himself to do it, but then he had been studying the law...' [IV, 46]. Thady doesn't disown Jason (later on, he warns him to flee the wrath of the pro-Rackrent mob), but does find himself alienated from and perplexed by his behaviour, as the reference to the impersonal agency of the law suggests. The law implies, for Thady, the antithesis of his own haphazard, idiomatic, ironic and very personal sense of things, while the law, as he undoubtedly remembers from Sir Murtagh's regime, is precise, supposedly unambiguous, and no respecter of name or rank. Versed in law, his son can come between Thady and his master. Interestingly, at this juncture, the narrative uses 'child' in similes. Now, at the beginning of the end, Sir Condry is said to have 'no more malice or thought of the like in him than the child that can't speak' [IV, 40]. Officiating at Jason's formal takeover from Sir Condry, though in a wholly servile capacity, Thady finds himself 'crying like a child' [IV, 50]. He withdraws from the scene, to find the only source of consolation the company of 'the neighbour's childer....that seemed to have some natural feeling left in them' (ibid) - not the best material to withstand Jason's rule, we infer.

If Jason is the future, then the future has an ugly look about it, and his winning through is to be taken as a solemn warning to landlords who are in dereliction of their duty. It's been said that Castle Rackrent contains 'no sense of the impending future.'²⁹ I believe that the sense is implied that the future will, in Jason's or Isabella's hands, be more tawdry, wasteful and even more ill-begotten than the past.

Of all the characters in Castle Rackrent, Thady alone embodies the terms of reference appropriate to a relationship between identity and community. He is the one who seems to be uniquely in place, at the very outset he tells us of his special relationship with 'the family, upon whose estate...I and mine have lived rent free time out of mind' [IV, 1]. He it is who, in his loyalty, embodies a sense of honour which he imputes to the family. But while these terms give stability to his position and define his role as narrator, it is not a relationship which bears fruit. It is not a relationship he has worked out for himself, but rather one that has been conferred on him by force of circumstances. No power accrues to it. Thady confronts change by evasions, alibis and silences, much as his favourite, Sir Condry, does. They are partners in entropy. And rather than bring about an enabling consciousness, the relationship is the basis of a false - indeed disabling - awareness. Thady's position, unique as it is, may in fact be as accidentally derived as the Rackrents'. The relationship, though present in its constituent elements, is not active as a relationship, since Thady can only see it operating in one way, namely as a means of consolidating his privileged position with the family. Herein lies its novelty as well as its poverty. And as an enactment of this poverty - the decline he sketches from 'honest Thady' through 'old

Thady' to 'poor Thady' (ibid) - his narrative fails to reach a conclusion. Instead, it meanders to a halt. If indeed, 'There is a time when individuals can bear to be rallied for their past follies and absurdities, after they have acquired new habits and a new consciousness' [IV, vi], the possibility of such a perspective is denied the Rackrents, and denied by them. Thady is merely the unwitting instrument of its articulation, which is perhaps only to be expected from a character who devoted 'upwards of fourscore and ten years' [IV, 70] to self-defeating servitude. The very terms by which Thady has to realise himself are terms which have no social viability. Hence he remains the eternal recipient of experience, never its initiator.

There is such a consistency of failure in Castle Rackrent that it would be difficult to envisage another novel in the same vein. It's been said that Edgeworth never used a Thady-like narrator again because 'the viewpoint she wanted to adopt was English and forward-looking.'³⁰ In other words, she wanted to repudiate the contents of what is agreed to be a pioneering work of fiction, in order to produce work she herself considered pioneering, work that would exemplify 'a new consciousness.' Her efforts in this area are our next concern.

(ii) Ennui

It is a limitation of all Edgeworth's subsequent Irish fiction that it doesn't offer a sense of working out an answer to the problem, How to live on the land? Indeed, it asserts the answer. As already noted, this is the characteristic it shares with her other fiction. But the answer (in its very assertion, contrary to the spirit of exploration in which her protagonists face their Irish

experiences) is approached from different standpoints. The conclusions of Ennui, The Absentee and Ormond are all alike and smack of the readymade. The means by which they are reached differ, indicating that the abiding question contains various separate, though related, points of emphasis. And asserting the answer in itself shows that Edgeworth took up the challenge of deterioration presented in Castle Rackrent, took it up so vigorously that Ennui has been called 'a well-intentioned but rather priggish tract.'³¹

There are two very obvious points of contact between Ennui and Castle Rackrent, which enable us to substantiate the claim that the latter begs a question which the former answers. One obvious common feature is that both novels are 'memoirs'. Both have first-person narrators. A retrospective air, a sense of having lived through a phase of life, is present in both novels. Two related ends are served by casting Ennui in the form of a memoir. One is that it allows the exploitation of first-person narrative technique, so that the central focus of the novel, the narrator, is seen to authorise his own status. Just as Thady is complicit in the state of affairs he describes - he is to some extent both agent and victim - so Lord Glenthorn in Ennui is responsible for his experiences, though his realisation of the fact, expressed in candid disavowal of his erroneous ways, prevents him from victimisation, though it is by almost becoming a casualty of disorder that the realisation is brought home. (His candour is facilitated by the immediacy of first-person narration.) Secondly, this narrative method places Edgeworth in an editorial role, making it seem as if she is transmitting observations which have a claim to extra-fictional substantiation: 'aiming at an effect as near as possible to objectivity.'³²

The second point of contact is that, like its predecessor, Ennui is concerned with absenteeism. This phenomenon is not fully faced in Castle Rackrent. There it is present as merely one of a number of forces competing for the ruin of the estate. And of course we wouldn't expect Thady to give a structured account of it, much less an analysis. Nevertheless, covert though its presence is (Sir Kit is the only Rackrent who fits the sociological description of an absentee, and even then only for part of his career), it has a crucial bearing on events. Through Sir Kit's absenteeism, Jason gets an opening, and is coached in the finer points of exploitation and opportunism by the agent handling the family's affairs.

Lord Glenthorn is also an absentee, but in his narrative the fact has greater structural prominence. Because of his ignorance of life on the land he makes the mistakes from which he ultimately learns - learns in fact that his whole position is based on a mistake. Liberated from a false position by this piece of information he is then able to change the bearing of his life and eventually halt the inroads made by absenteeism. In this aspect, Ennui reaches a conclusion, whereas Castle Rackrent merely terminates.

In the case of absenteeism, the fact that Ennui and Castle Rackrent deal with it in different ways is more important than its being a feature common to both novels. This is also true of the fact that both are narrated in the first person. Thady's narrative has the tone of a voice speaking. The nature of his consciousness is discerned by observing the lapses, evasions and blind-spots in what he says. While not entirely a voice without a mind, the quality of Thady's mind is problematic. The ironic force of what he says derives from his ignorance of irony. By no means can he

be described as a self-conscious narrator. As for members of the family whom he intends to honour, being brought to self-consciousness proves dreadfully menacing. A sense of limitation, enforced by weight of circumstance, is not an enabling realisation, but rather presages - indeed seems coextensive with - a sense of terminus.

Glenthorn's narrative, on the other hand, has the tone of a man writing, implicit in which is the idea of self-conscious ordering. This self-consciousness breaks through into the fabric of the narrative in the penultimate chapter; that is, when Glenthorn has achieved self-possession and earned its external counterpart, an adequate social role:

If, among those who may be tempted to peruse my history, there should be any mere novel readers, let me advise them to throw the book aside at the commencement of this chapter; for I have no more wonderful incidents to relate...I am now become a plodding man of business, poring over law books. [IV, 388-9]

Thady has appointed himself the Rackrents' amanuensis. Glenthorn is his own, even if, in fact, his narrative does contain a final unexpected and, so to speak, unauthorised turn of events. The assertive personal tone of his statement is an expression of confidence, and significantly shows his awareness of distinct modes of articulation. Such evidence of an ability to discriminate, coupled with a sense of diligent attention to a norm, is an indication of the progress Glenthorn has made. The difference between the awareness which can declare precisely 'I am become...' and the sense we have of Thady's pathetic repetitious and undifferentiated 'I am...' (mediated by his consuming will to loyalty) is a convincing expression of the progress Edgeworth made in minting the obverse of the debased Rackrent coin. It may be that Ennui 'helped to inaugurate a new style of sociological realism'.³³ It certainly is the first Irish

novel to assert positively the possibility of a relationship between identity and community, and by so asserting affirm its desirability.

Motifs of rebirths and renewal form the basis of Ennui.

Before going on to examine their influence something should be said about what Glenthorn is being reborn from.

His condition at the beginning of the memoir is an echo of the Rackrents'. He is a vice-prone young buck whose only ambition seems to be the exhaustion of his appetites. His understanding of public presence is based on self-indulgence and self-protection, not on any constructive social motive. Marriage for him is simply the result of a lost law-suit, and he admits to have 'never felt the passion of love' [IV, 221]. The state of his affections is corrupt and atrophied and he seems in thrall to his social impotence, in a curious sense addicted to ennui, in a manner reminiscent of the Rackrents' enslavement to their various weaknesses. The Rackrents and Glenthorn are alike in their embodiment of a singular, fixated sense of this presence and attachment, a sense so all-embracing and so incapable of acknowledging variety that it borders on the solipsistic.

But of course the great difference between the two cases is that Glenthorn is rescued. In the first instance, however, the rescue services must come to him. He is incapable of doing anything on his own behalf, apart from resolve his condition by giving it its ultimate expression by killing himself. Rescue is embodied in two Irish peasants, both of whom feel they have a claim on him. One is his nurse, who represents the personal dimension; the other is a former tenant (Noonan the pugilist), representing the community interest. Glenthorn's happening on both these characters is fortuitous and artistically contrived. In one sense, however, it is

necessary that his encountering them should be fortuitous. His own experiences as a gambler and rake have their origin in the same realm. (The contrivance is an overemphasis of the accidental nature of the encounters: for example, Ellinor arrives on Glenthorn's birthday, the day he elects to commit suicide.) It is fitting, therefore, that the claims made by these two foreigners be unsought by Glenthorn, and that their joint effect be to renew a lost area of himself. Ellinor and Noonan both appeal to his affections, and through this appeal the presence of an Irish dimension to Glenthorn's life, dormant because he has denied it, is reactivated. At first of course he has no knowledge of its nature, but thanks to the moving and restorative qualities of these two influential encounters, he shows himself disposed to experience anew his native land. Ellinor impresses him as 'the only person upon earth who cared for me' [IV, 228]. She in her warmth and picturesque folk-memory tries to entice Glenthorn back to Ireland, painting a tempting (though of course only partly realistic) picture of 'the sort of feudal power I should possess in my vast territory' [IV, 232].

Ellinor sows the seeds of Glenthorn's possible return, and after his wife's elopement, his divorce and the run-down of his English establishment he is attracted to fantasies of overlordship. But it is the encounter with Noonan which provides the impetus actually to cross the Irish sea. Now it is Glenthorn who admits an appeal to his humanity. In accepting the trust of a dying man he is making a gesture that, to the reader at any rate, is new and unfamiliar. Glenthorn sums up the situation: 'Pity for this unfortunate Irishman recalled Ireland to my thoughts' [IV, 241].

Possibly the pity has been aroused by the cruelty and waste of the public spectacle which cost Noonan his life. The boxing match may be seen as an emblem of the extremes of unproductiveness, and of the aimless and destructive fight for status, which conspired almost to bring about Glenthorn's own end. (Edgeworth, through Glenthorn, conveys the ugliness of boxing by listing its technical terms: 'bruisers',...'beating',...'sparring'...'sawing - and chopping' (ibid).)

But significant as these two Irish influences have been, Glenthorn is as yet unable to articulate it. In deciding to cross to Ireland he is aware only of 'many small reasons' (ibid) and 'mixed motives' (ibid) for doing so. The disentangling of the mixture is the great task confronting Glenthorn, though he doesn't realise it and spends most of his time avoiding the fact. The process of disentanglement presupposes an ultimate recognition of a norm, of regularity, of motive. How to recognise such a norm, and how to articulate the recognition is Glenthorn's task.

Interestingly, then, his first acquaintance with Dublin suggests that the city is in an analogous condition to his own. He notes the 'mixture of the magnificent and the paltry' [IV, 242] to be found in the public prospect, and indeed the national consciousness can be compared to his mental condition. '"This is too often the case with us in Ireland", he is told, "we can project, but we can't calculate"' (ibid). Glenthorn doesn't see the analogy, and it can't be considered a decisive factor, at least not in these localised terms. The important feature of his initial Irish experiences is their failure to match Glenthorn's expectations. The country is both better and worse than he'd anticipated, which gives the sense of 'mixture' an objective structure. Glenthorn leaves himself open to

the variety of objective phenomena and doesn't choose to deny their variety. This response is a gesture to the real, unusual for Glenthorn but in line with his responses to Ellinor and Noonan, in that he acknowledges in a rudimentary (that is, not rewardingly self-conscious) manner that the world stimulates responses which he is not compelled to exploit to substantiate his ego.

As I say, these responses are a very elementary form of relatedness, and Glenthorn is not yet in a position to strengthen them. The farther west he travels - the farther away he moves from his customary haunts - the greater the sense of unexpectedness becomes, until its characteristics comprise a different kind of 'mixture', consisting exclusively of the headlong, the ramshackle and the disorienting. His final landfall is reached after a nightmarish coachride. His destination, then, is foreign territory: as such it represents a crucial challenge.

The welcoming response of the peasantry confer on him a public status much more impressive than any he had attained before. Of course his inexperience obliges him to accept their importuning homage at face value. A swarm of ragged tenants confines him to quarters, and in contemplating them Glenthorn finds himself 'supported by the agreeable idea of my own power and consequence; a power seemingly next to despotic' [IV, 256]. The feudal character of this outlook is of course anachronistic, and the lordly identity Glenthorn believes he should assume in order to mediate it belies the reality of the case on two counts. Firstly, by translating both himself and the peasantry into an anachronistic formula, he is asserting the distance that exists between them, instead of attempting to modify it. In doing so he tends to obscure the claims of their peasant presence. Secondly, and to some extent as a result of

this attitude, he finds himself at odds with his agent, M'Leod, for whom estate management is the application of Modern social theory, a matter of thought, experience and a sense of involvement based on well-considered principles. M'Leod doesn't strike a pose; he abides by a discipline. This Glenthorn finds unbearable, chiefly because it is pedestrian and aims at consistency, as might be expected from the practical expression of theoretical standards. At this juncture Glenthorn desires to live up to a self-enhancing image of himself and not in accordance with more mature mental processes.

Nevertheless those who 'all together gave more the idea of vassals than of tenants and carried my imagination centuries back to feudal times' [IV, 251] may be availed of, Glenthorn believes, as a means of rationalising his presence: 'I was no longer a man with a will of my own, or with time at my disposal' [IV, 255]. In other words he believes that his Irish situation is the complete reverse of his English one. But in fact Glenthorn makes a very poor despot. His most notable failure is the affair of Ellinor's cottage, but by the time this debacle occurs Glenthorn has already been half-enticed away from principled activity of whatever quality by the vulgarian, anti-intellectual, undisciplined Hardcastle, agent of the neighbouring Ormsby estate, M'Leod's opposite in every respect. A modern reader might well feel inclined to endorse the remark that 'a peasant might be excused for preferring hanging at the hands of Hardcastle to improvement at the hands of M'Leod,'³⁴ but there is no doubt as to Edgeworth's own emphasis: Hardcastle's derisive remarks about education are enough to damn him, never mind the overall laxity of his outlook and behaviour.

Through Hardcastle, Glenthorn is introduced to Irish country-house life on the Ormsby estate. The company he finds in

this setting is a parcel of oddments:

...the knowing Widow O'Connor; the English dasher Lady Mauton; the interesting Mrs. Norton, separated but not parted from her husband, the pleasant Miss Bland; the three Miss Ormsbys, better known by the name of the Swanlinbar Graces; two English aides-de-camp from the Castle, and a brace of brigadiers; besides other men of inferior note. [IV, 276-7]

Glenthorn is implicitly superior to these, but we note that between them this gallery contains a mixture of those elements which have motivated Glenthorn to become acquainted with them, namely shallowness, role-playing and social disengagement. The list quoted represents the middle order of the company. These guests are a type of country-house party norm. But the company also contains two extremes. One is personified by Lord Craiglethorpe, an English traveller who is writing a book about Ireland on the basis of a wholly superficial acquaintance with and exposure to the country. The other is Lady Geraldine, who 'looked, spoke and acted, like a person privileged to think, say and do, what she pleased' [IV, 281]. Both of these have an effect on Glenthorn.

Craiglethorpe's impact is oblique, and depends for its full force on Lady Geraldine's remorselessly contriving to expose his lack of adequate purchase on his position. This she manages to do by playing on the most vulnerable area of his identity, his emotions. Earlier events have revealed Glenthorn's vulnerability and incompetence in the same area, characteristics which he is forced to acknowledge by contracting an infatuation with Lady Geraldine. In other words, the influence of the essentially self-authorising Lady Geraldine is first felt in an unsocial realm of experience, or at least in a realm of experience the social dimension of which is not its most compelling feature. Lady Geraldine rebuffs his advances, and is enabled to do so because of her attachment to Cecil Devereux, whose standing bears

a superficial resemblance to Glenthorn's: he too is socially displaced. But this is due to his having taken a principled stand against a prevailing political trend. In other words Devereux's lack of place has been consciously and voluntarily commissioned. It is the product of a coherent and integrated enunciation of motive; in contrast, Glenthorn's position is the product of a disjointed admixture of motive. It comes as no surprise to find Devereux's position reversed. His quality of mind - apprehended in terms of a complex but essentially well-balanced self-possession - is such that the public domain must acknowledge its claim upon it.

The result of seeing the ease with which the shallow Craiglethorpe can be erased from the scene, and of experiencing involvement with an exemplary couple (the first that the novel portrays) provides Glenthorn with a lesson in seriousness. To this lesson Glenthorn himself is conscious of responding, and noting this, Lady Geraldine points out to him the road that lies ahead (and, in affirming 'that only motive and opportunity were wanting to make his lordship's superior qualities known to the world, and, what is still more difficult, to himself' [IV, 321], draws attention to the twin spheres of responsibility which are our concern). Gratified by this encouragement, Glenthorn still remains oblivious to the possibility of an adequate context for self-advancement. The departure of the Devereuxs leaves him as dislocated and purposeless as ever. He travels Ireland to no avail, he indulges in a fit of activity on his estate to no practical effect: finally, he resolves to go back to England. In other words, the Devereuxs, while presenting a prima facie case for an alliance between freedom of thought and responsibility of action, do not bequeath to Glenthorn a rationale

for it. Lady Geraldine's reference to 'the world' is stimulating but essentially unparticularised. Finding an adequate social form in which to invest himself is still Glenthorn's major problem. And it is also the chief concern of his immediate context, though this becomes forcefully apparent only when the Devereuxs have made their point.

The rebellion which now breaks out is, from a fictional point of view, a mysterious affair - necessarily so. The use of such resources as sequestration, nocturnal visits, largely unidentified and unexpressly motivated sources of subversion, is a means of revealing that Glenthorn is remote from the reality in which he has chosen to reside. He is not only vaguely, and therefore unhelpfully, conscious of the prevailing condition of unfixity of which he is an unwitting exemplar, but in this crucial instance, he lacks the essential information on which a course of corrective action might be based. The rebellion is the ultimate expression of the counter-social tendencies amongst which he has been fluctuating. Lady Geraldine's reference to the possibility of a fitting, self-authorized, social dimension is made to coincide with the revelation of a plot which, if successful, will negate any such possibility. At first sight the rebels' ultimatum to Glenthorn seems ludicrous in its political naiveté, and parochiality. The demand that the young lord become their captain or lose his life may be read as an expression of the rebels' inability to articulate radical, far-reaching, change. It is, perhaps, an expression of Edgeworth's belief in the irrationalism of rebellion, a belief so firmly held that it remains unexamined and as a result seems structurally weak in a novel devoted to examining the sources of social motivation. But the rebels are not

the main consideration, as their decision to focus their immediate efforts on the fate of Lord Glenthorn indicates.

This decision puts forward the alternatives with which Glenthorn has been flirting throughout: he can either be a popular hero or a victim. The former choice, we note, entails becoming a meaningful power (of sorts) in the world; the latter carries with it the penalty of loss of self. Neither alternative is attractive. In order to express his rejection of the rebel demand, however, Glenthorn has to rely on the two most problematic features of his presence. These are problematic because he cannot articulate his consciousness of them in a manner which will determine their structural usefulness: that is, they are available merely as aspects of his pattern of experience up to this point, not as sources of annealment over which he exercises control.

One is the tendency of those elements of his world to which he feels attached, and in whose fate he voluntarily acknowledges a degree of (at least) emotional implication, to reciprocate the attachment in an enabling way. Just as Ellinor embodied a pretext of relatedness synonymous with her Irishness at the outset of the novel, so now she is in a position to reveal to him vital information about the rebels. (The world that is on the brink of decisive dislocation invokes the presence of its accredited centre in the hope that by ratifying his role it will attain its own stability.) The second problematic feature is a counterpart to this. By virtue of Glenthorn's inability to structure an adequate status for himself, he is, as the novel insistently demonstrates, available to all types of experience; good, bad and indifferent. Such openness and such variety of experience presuppose a capacity to respond to them; otherwise, a dreadful uniformity of experiential norms would result.

(The novel opens by describing such a condition, namely ennui. We remember that Glenthorn attempts to struggle against it, and how painfully impotent the struggle seems to him because the world refuses constructively to bear witness to it.) If Glenthorn is consistent in nothing else, he is so at least in his capacity to respond. His is, up to this point, an undifferentiated capacity. The function of the rebellion episode is to clarify his powers of discrimination, a basis for doing so being provided by the crudely polarised terms of the rebels' demands.

As noted above, Glenthorn plunges into counter-insurgency, winning the day with ease. M'Leod notes his master's spirited performance with the remark: "'Tis a pity...but that there was a conspiracy against you every day of your life, it seems to do you so much good"' [IV, 349]. Effective as his efforts have been (and it should be noted that the success is grounded in an epistemological framework of whose beneficial uses Glenthorn has previously remained ignorant, one which embraces foresight, planning and the various other lineaments of intentionality), they are merely a preamble to the revolution in identity occasioned by Ellinor's revelation of the nursery conspiracy.

Even upon sober reflection - that is, acting as a memoirist - Glenthorn expresses the difficulty of accommodating this revelation:

'Le vrai n'est pas toujours vraisemblable,' says an acute observer of human affairs. The romance of real life certainly goes beyond all other romances: and there are facts which few writers would dare to put into a book, as there are skies which few painters would venture to put into a picture. [IV, 354]

With one blow, as it were, Ellinor removes the sense of himself which he was attempting to live up to (valuably exposing its façade-like nature) as well as the context in which that self might be expected to mature and which, in fact, he was failing to come to

terms with: indeed the upshot of the turning point in the novel which the rebellion represents is that the context comes to terms with him, conspiring, so to speak, to make him bear the onus of individuality implicit in his determination to prevent the subversion of his good name by a-social forces.

Now Glenthorn recognises he has a choice: 'To be or not to be Lord Glenthorn, or in other words, to be or not to be a villain, was now the question' [IV, 359]. He also realises that in rejecting villainy, he is rejecting the life in which circumstances conspired to clothe him. By taking the honourable path, he is opting for vulnerability, uncertainly and singularity: in other words he is accepting these terms as the nomenclature of enablement, whereas hitherto they had denoted the very facets of experience characteristic of the sense of self-cancellation contained in his ill-founded status. The choice of individuality not alone represents a change of social mode, but a change in epistemological orientation, as Glenthorn himself, in passing, concedes: '...truths [that] are as old as the world...appeared quite new to me when I discovered them by my own experience' [IV, 365]. The memoir from this point onward is punctuated with self-felicitating remarks regarding his achievement: 'I was pleased with myself for my honest conduct', [IV, 365]: 'I was capable of forming a character for myself' [IV, 406]. But perhaps as significant as his voluntary adjustment is the one which the world at large now makes in his favour, situating him in a sequence of liberating occasions.

Ellinor dies. Having performed her duty, little remains for her, and in dying puts the seal on her son's former life by offering him a new one bearing little relation to her own. The silencing of Ellinor, whose voice kept prompting, in-

forming and stimulating Glenthorn, is instrumental in equipping our hero with a voice of his own, and with a mode and context of articulation. (It's not by chance that Glenthorn studies law. His critical courtroom scene is, as he describes it, a drama of self-possession. The remark of his mentor, Lord Y-, after the hearing - 'Your trial is over - successfully over - you have convinced me of your powers and your perseverance' [IV, 404], - drives the point home; and of course it's an auspicious sign in itself that Glenthorn has attached himself to a mentor.) During this period, in which interestingly Glenthorn divides his time between London and Dublin, another death provides further liberation - that of his wife whose funeral in squalid circumstances he fortuitously happens on (a circumstance which egregiously confirms that his lucky star is now decidedly in the ascendant).

Coincidental with his successful appearance in court is the consolidation of his attachment with the featureless but wealthy Cecilia Delamere, heiress-at-law to the Glenthorn estate; a juxtaposition which structures the relationship between the public and the private Glenthorn. These two attainments evince the remark: 'From this hour I date the commencement of my life of real happiness' (ibid). Behind the immediate context, of course, is the larger world of life on the land which Glenthorn is now in a position to inherit and in which he has earned and merited fully-accredited, self-authorised status.

As a treatment of the theme of identity and community, Ennui emphasises the identity question, as if Edgeworth's primary response to the problem set in Castle Rackrent is 'first catch your hero'. Preoccupation with community is not entirely relegated from the foreground, but it does occupy a subsidiary role. Its status as a

problematic area emerges clearly enough: at least it is depicted as such. But the nature of the problematic is not fully investigated. Glenthorn's adjustment to the presence of M^rLeod - a presence which survives all the fluctuations of fortune which befall the estate - is assumed rather than explored, a lacuna which is consistent with what might be called the rhetoric of adjustment which characterises Glenthorn's career after Ellinor's death. Nevertheless, life on the land is explicitly offered as the crowning outcome of his lordship's trials. His having earned a place in the world is ratified by his acceptability as a marriage partner, and this act of union is translated into more categorically social terms by entitling Glenthorn not only to the material fact of the estate but also, within its context, to the expectation 'that a man may at once be rich and noble, and active and happy' [IV, 408].

(iii) The Absentee

Like Ennui, its predecessor in the chronology of Edgeworth's Irish fiction and its forerunner in the series of Tales of Fashionable Life, The Absentee presents an outline of how a relationship between identity and community may be arrived at. In spite of the outline being in this case more complex, the diagrammatic overtones implied by the descriptive term are very much in evidence. I mention this because, while I think The Absentee is a more elaborate attempt to answer the questions raised by Castle Rackrent than Ennui, this does not necessarily mean that it has more intellectual penetration or emotional subtlety than the earlier novel. Edgeworth's perspective has changed. In other words, if Ennui considered identity, its successor shows an overwhelmingly social bias, so pronounced in fact that it has been described as 'the first "national" novel that was fully

recognisable as such.'³⁵ In general, critical opinion is agreed that The Absentee is superior to Ennui because, 'It is, to begin with, much more firmly rooted in social actualities.'³⁶

This conclusion needs a certain amount of clarification. It is true that The Absentee has a greater range, tonally as well as structurally, but rather than see it as an improvement on Ennui, I view it as a counterpart to the earlier tale of fashionable life. The later work has more striking and entertaining scenes, from which it seems reasonable to infer that Edgeworth felt more at home depicting social milieux, but given that her orientation has changed, it must be noted that her artistic strategy is the same here as it was in Ennui. The change of perspective has been accompanied by technical changes, the most obvious one being that, for the first time, an approach to Ireland is objectified by means of a third person narrative. At the same time, however, Ireland becomes a setting for disorienting routines, mistakes, emotional naiveté - in other words, for what Edgeworth curiously seems to regard as the most fundamental ingredients of experience: novelty and jeopardy. Judging by the evidence of Ennui and The Absentee it is out of a sense of the crucial and necessary intermingling of these two elements that her artistic strategies arise. Her ideological commitments are a gloss on such interaction, which is not to dismiss them, but merely to note their secondary aesthetic status.

Considering The Absentee as a counterpart to Ennui is obviously facilitated by the fact that they are both tales of fashionable life. But it is also revealing of the structure of imbalance which characterises the Edgeworth Irish novels that in order fully to articulate the terms of the relationship between identity and community, each particular term is the basis of an

individual perspective. In both novels the possibility of the relationship is presumed; what's being delineated is the status of the different terms of the relationship.

As members of the Tales of Fashionable Life series, both novels have common features. These may be seen most clearly be comparing Lord Glenthorn and The Absentee's hero. In Ennui, Lord Glenthorn is presented as a means of evaluating Regency manners. Lord Colambre has the same function. Both are young, at the beginning of their moral careers - that is, their social and emotional lives (and in The Absentee these two realms coexist and, to an extent, are interdependent - to what precise extent the development of the story reveals). Both young men are placed in a critical relationship to their milieux, both are independently wealthy, and both are absentee landlords with Irish interests and dependents. But these similarities are no more than general biographical observations. Just as in the case of both novels overall it is the change of perspective, not the congruity of theme, that commands attention, so with the two heroes their differences are presented as being more significant than their similarities, even though those differences are bound, and highlighted, by identical frameworks.

The main difference, of course, must concern the reasons why Edgeworth is able to have a social orientation in The Absentee. To see how, we must start by noting the difference between that which, in both cases, is the critical element in their customary (that is to say, non-Irish, metropolitan) social relationships. Lord Glenthorn who, when we first meet him, is in effect an orphan, has been exposed willy-nilly, as might be expected of one bereft of guide or mentor,

to the complete range of viciousness available in society. So intense has this exposure been that the young man's only means of defending himself against it was to introject its recurring, and inevitable, reverses. From this process of self-cancellation Glenthorn could not escape. The resultant ennui provided a sense of non-self.

Colambre's situation in London is quite different. To begin with, he is not an orphan. In other words, he is more intimately connected with that social prototype, the family, than Glenthorn could ever be. Thus while the latter's experiences are dealt with in a generalised, dismissive manner (appropriate, no doubt, to the momentum of the memoir form), Colambre's milieu, for which his parents are responsible, is rich in vivifying detail, which gives it a resonant typicality. It also facilitates the portrayal of numerous characters, each sharing the colourful immediacy of the milieu and, by the very fact of their numbers, contributing a sense of society. But although he bears witness to his parents' society, Colambre is in no sense of it. In fact in the novel's opening, and liveliest, scenes, he seems a weighty, but colourless, adjunct to the proceedings. Only Ireland can show Colambre in his true colours. He almost invariably stands apart from the milieu, entering it only when circumstances compel him to assert himself. Our first encounter with Colambre, in the foyer of a theatre, neatly typifies his status in the pre-Irish chapters:

Incapable of the meanness of voluntarily listening to a conversation not intended for him to hear, he had, however, been compelled, by the pressure of the crowd, to remain a few minutes stationary, where he could not avoid hearing the remarks of the fashionable friends: disdaining dissimulation, he made no attempt to conceal his displeasure. Perhaps his vexation was increased by his consciousness that there was some mixture of truth in their sarcasms. [IV, 4-5]

In brief, then, Colambre does not identify with the fashionable throng; he repudiates their standards and judgements; he is his own man; his integrity is flexible; and he is not afraid of having attained to consciousness. (This last attribute may be one of the products of his Cambridge education, which he has just completed. For Glenthorn, we recall, formal education is obtained later on in life.) The question implicitly raised by Colambre's presence - and we note that Edgeworth here is merely asserting his presence (he doesn't declare his 'displeasure'), and does so by drawing attention to integrity, singularity, mental capacity, and a sense of Colambre being a locus of values other than those embodied by a norm - is, what social sense would result from the articulation of such values? This question comes to the fore because of the seeming completeness and sufficiency of Colambre's self-hood. It may be overstating the case to describe this young lord (whose entitlement to nobility exists in its own right: his claim to the status accruing to lordship is never questioned, unlike Glenthorn's) as Edgeworth's prototype of post-Union man. Nevertheless, his integrity is further vouchsafed for in the following remark:

The sobriety of English good sense mixed most advantageously with Irish vivacity: English prudence governed, but did not distinguish, his Irish enthusiasm. (VI, 6)

This combination of winning traits seems to make Colambre a representative of the Union, the terms of the act translated into terms of identity. The mixture is the antithesis of Glenthorn's; unevenness has been regularised, though by what means is not clear, since Colambre's education - 'his ambition for intellectual superiority' (ibid) - is merely mentioned, not explored though its moral weight is exemplified by the judiciousness of his social behaviour, his powers of discrimination and evaluation being unrepresentative of, and eccentric to, the norms of his milieu. Not surprisingly,

his decision to go to Ireland is not a product of the mixture of motives that Glenthorn's was. On the contrary, he is quite explicit about his reasons, as he tells his mother:

the honour of my family, your happiness, my mother, my father's, are my first objects: I shall never think of my own till these are secured.' [VI, 70]

We note 'the honour of the family' is now a consideration that can be seriously negotiated and pursued; the phrase has no ironic reverberations here, as it had (perhaps to an obsessive degree) in Castle Rackrent.

That novel and Ennui broach the problem of absenteeism without ever giving it the fictional status it attains in Edgeworth's third Irish novel. The misalliances and dislocations for which the social construct known as absenteeism was responsible in the two earlier works are here fully articulated - literally in the case of Lady Clonbrony, Colambre's mother, whose attempts at refined speech emerge as distortions, in terms of intonation, or in other words, immediacy of impact (and hence social utility), a non-language. No doubt the 'witty, caustic opening chapters'³⁷ of The Absentee are a triumph of Edgeworth's satirical style. But perhaps the reader is also intended to note the utter helplessness of Lady Clonbrony in attempting to enter and consolidate a position in fashionable life. Her Irish experience has ill-equipped her for such a venture, but in addition, her failure is due to the trivial, superficial nature of being in public which life in the metropolis at its most typical offers her. It is difficult to laugh all the time at Lady Clonbrony. In her we see the outcome of the attitude espoused by Sir Terence O'Fay, one of Lord Clonbrony's cronies: 'one of the Dublin Castle understrappers who engineered the Union.'³⁸ Asked by Grace Nugent, who is his equal and opposite in the Clonbrony circle, if his friends

never think of the future, he blithely replies, "The future! leave the future to posterity...I'm counsel only for the present." [VI, 65]. But the present is manifestly hollow, insufficient, as its representatives make plain; it is a void of their own making. Sir Terence may indeed be 'one of the charms of the novel'³⁹, but he is no guide to the sense of social awareness needed to fill that void. As to the future, it is to Colambre we must look for any sense of it.

If Lady Clonbrony exemplifies a principle of active social striving and the distressing incompetence and self-defeat thereby entailed, Colambre's father is the passive dupe of the conventions which now govern his existence. His wife has decisively set her face against returning to Ireland, that realm of significant, appropriately socialising, endeavour. Lord Clonbrony is entangled in this decision. While his wife loses face, he loses substance, running into debt with a villainous carriage-maker. A display of moral force on Colambre's part relieves this situation, but it is more difficult for him to escape the toils of his mother's pretensions, the most crucial manifestation of which is the marriage she is determined to arrange between him and Miss Broadhurst. Such a marriage would, we infer, be a powerful emblem of anchorage to Lady Clonbrony, more powerful perhaps than a factual enactment of her own coming to rest, since her mind is besotted by outward manifestations of 'the done thing.' But it is precisely the hollowness of such a proposed contract that crystallises Colambre's sense of estrangement from his mother's circumstances, and provides the context for his statement about family honour already quoted.

But while the Broadhurst affair clarifies the bogus, self-distorting quality of Colambre's milieu, there are reasons other than simple revulsion as to why he cannot comply with his mother's designs.

These reasons, though they do not necessarily have a bearing on each other at this stage of the novel, can be seen to represent the twin terms of our theme, and obtain to relationship by the novel's conclusion.

The first of these is Colambre's 'cousin', Grace Nugent. Like Colambre, her position in the household is somewhat detached - and it is important to note that every member of the Clonbrony ménage is an absentee, Colambre and Grace being, by their rather austere competent demeanour, as much in exile from consistently meaningful social engagement as their elders are. But Grace's situation is more problematic, since she has no resources with which to open up an alternative world for herself, and articulates her detachment by being obdurately (and, it must be admitted, barrenly) resistant to the blandishments of the salon. She seems Colambre's anima:

Beautiful and graceful, yet so unconscious was she of her charms, that the eye of admiration could not rest upon her without perceiving it - she seemed so intent upon others as totally to forget herself. The whole train of Colambre's thought was so completely deranged, that, although he was sensible there was something of importance he had to say to his mother, yet... he stood silent, unable to recollect any thing but - Grace Nugent. [VI, 14-15]

Though 'she never for a moment allowed herself to think of Lord Colambre as a lover' [VI, 42], her description lends her an air of unrealised potential, which is a function of her detached status. Clearly she is equal to anything the metropolis might confront her with, but whatever that might be would diminish her. Like Colambre, then, her setting is unworthy of her, and if he is properly to realise himself he must create an alternative setting, by which act

he may entitle himself to Grace, in bringing about a more adequate context. The singleness which distinguishes her is an inspiration for Colambre to act on his own. Lady Clonbrony and her circle blithely assume that Grace should be flattered to marry amiable, ordinary Mr. Salisbury (an assumption similar to the Broadhurst-Colambre proposal). But, as in Colambre's case, it's not so much the partner that's inappropriate, but the context and the ethic governing it.

Grace Nugent is an implicit motivator for Colambre's realisation of full self-hood, and all the other proposed emotional alliances question the basis, context and status for such an undertaking. The superstructure overriding these subplots - which by their very nature suggest a possibility of alternative structures, new establishments, fresh beginnings - is absenteeism, a term which denotes absence of structure, clamorous strivings, and a species of moral exhaustion (note Lady Clonbrony's compulsive externalising, her obsession with façade, which lead her further and further away from any adequately substantiating sense of self, manifested by increasingly distorted contexts, all with an outré cultural undertone - for example, her Egyptian evening: this perhaps also, a satirical slap from Edgeworth at the pretensions of Regency cultivation of the East). Clearly, then, Colambre must redress absenteeism.

Not only is absenteeism a significant social phenomenon, but part of its significance is revealed by the phenomenon's availability as an enabling fictional structure: 'Miss Edgeworth valuably universalises the theme announced in her title so as to make "absenteeism" more than a merely topical issue and a narrowly Irish concern.'⁴⁰ The metropolitan sequence proves to be a motive for Colambre's departure to Ireland, but in addition the term

denotes the salient feature of those he encounters in the Irish context. If absenteeism describes unavailing, deleterious experience as typical of an Irish family abroad, striving after social relocation, it also focusses the nature of Irish experience in the aftermath of the Union. It is important that Colambre doesn't know this, since his ignorance - his lack of mature experience in Ireland - is a means of testing the resources of his inquiring spirit and of the predisposition, outlined in the inadequate context of his family circle, for judicious action, itself an expression of his selfhood's viability. Colambre is an absentee attempting to make good the dislocation inherent in his status. An image of his status is contained in his becoming a traveller, as was also the case of Lord Glenthorn. And as a traveller he has access to a variety of situations, out of which (by the principles of association held dear by Edgeworth) his capacity for discrimination and judiciousness should emerge intact and tempered. The clarity of Colambre's motives for setting forth (compared to Glenthorn's) draws attention to their intellectual bearing. Given that at least this realm of mind has been trained and regularised, it is reasonable to expect that, unlike his predecessor, Colambre will show himself to be an initiator of productive experience, instead of being reliant on the revelation of concealed information and on the world's readiness to compensate for the difficulties thereby entailed. It is part of the success of this novel in making the relationship between identity and community clearer that this expectation is not met in a predictable way. Colambre's Irish experience consists of perplexing involvement with both terms of the relationship. In fact Ireland represents, in its typical social occasions, not so much an antidote to absenteeism as an intensification of its ills.

Motifs of union and disguise pervade The Absentee, facilitating an imaginative exposition of its central, eponymous preoccupation. That absenteeism denotes the abiding fictional mechanism can be seen from the fact that all the characters suffer from its effects. The Clonbronzys and their son - to whom, we presume, the title explicitly refers - serve to focus the various other manifestations of the condition. Lady Dashfort is clearly out of place, as is Mrs. Raffarty, but no more so than Count O'Halloran. Colambre himself declares himself to be an absentee most clearly when he assumes a disguise in order to research life on his own and his family's land. Presenting himself as un homme inconnu is an expression of the fictional flexibility of absenteeism, but it is also a means of dramatising the impact that his true presence has on the different representatives of those who owe their living to him. The elevation of the real man over the sham entails the triumph of the worthy, put-upon peasantry over the exploitative, egocentric agent. Of course the services of the agent - that go-between, that ostensible inhabitant of someone else's rightful role - are dispensed with. Parallel to that resolution is the emergence of Count O'Halloran. It is not sufficient that he espouse an affection for England, but that he act on it as occasion demands. Emerging from his Irish retreat, he not only enlarges his sphere of action and occupies something like his proper place, he is instrumental in regularising the more problematic area of Colambre's life, that occupied by Grace Nugent.

It is surprising how relatively easily Colambre finally meets the investigative obligations of his visit, and bearing in mind the novel's title, it may seem that the business of Miss Nugent's status

occupies a disproportionate amount of our attention. After all, 'It was Ruskin's opinion that more could be learned of Irish politics by reading The Absentee than from a thousand columns of Blue books',⁴¹ so why dwell on an ill-fitting sub-plot which is mere 'romance'?⁴² But, as Brian O'Neil says of his Grace (and we remember that Colambre's intervention, his crucial assumption of initiative, which expedited their union: 'I'm not my own man till she's mine.' (VI, 165)). Our young hero feels the same way about his intended though he is not so explicit about it.

Marriage as an archetype of reconciliation and unification looms large in the novel: true marriage, that is. This may be seen from the effects that false marriage strategies have on Colambre's development. The fabricated proposal of Miss Broadhurst by Lady Clonbrony influences her son's decision to visit Ireland. The wiles of the Dashforts are an illuminating and disorienting experience of Ireland. Friar O'Neil's circumstances are a means of Colambre's articulating the full value of his social position. Not surprisingly, as marriage is the principal emblem of the novel's main positive motif, namely union, the question of the hero's own marriage must be important. In terms of the novel's effects, it must represent the rounding off of Colambre's identity. It must set the seal on his integrity, which Ireland in testing, nearly undermines. Rather than being eccentric to the somewhat programmatic design of the social, or community, interests of The Absentee, it is at the problematic heart of them, problematic being conceived of in terms of uncertainty as to birth, name and entitlement, which on the one hand clearly refer to questions of identity while, on the other (as was seen in Ennui), provide the very basis upon which an estimate of one's social self might be realised.

In order to assess the full significance of the Grace Nugent question, it must be seen in the wider context of Colambre's Irish sojourn. His journey there - and more important, the fact that he remains a traveller while there - suggest that he is on a voyage of discovery. This is implied by the investigative impulse he feels on setting out. But the nature of his various journeys is to bring him to decisive points of arrival, decisive because each of them reveals a facet of Irish conditions as they affect him. That is, Colambre's social experience illustrates areas of himself which have been unrevealed. In addition, however, the context of these experiences is intimate, domestic and consistently personal, as may be noted by recalling the number of times decisive encounters take place indoors. (In contrast to Ennui, there is no crucial sallying forth to meet an identifiable enemy for the hero. The question of his status, considered under both its community and identity aspects, is not accounted for by any one dramatic revelation.) Each experience is an eye-opener for Colambre, and each generates a momentum leading to an ensuing, more influential encounter, whether the particular host of each occasion desires this or not. Echoing Sir Terence O'Fay's earlier remark, Lady Dashfort exclaims at the end of the visit during which Colambre first meets Count O'Halloran, 'I declare, you know nothing of the future' [VI, 122]. But in making this introduction, her ladyship has unwittingly given him access to a sense of the future, as Colambre realises once he has broken with her baneful influence:

When he first came to Ireland, he had been very eager to go and see his father's estate, and to judge of the conduct of his agents, and the condition of his tenantry, but this eagerness had subsided, and the design had almost faded from his mind, while under the influence of Lady Dashfort's misrepresentations. [VI, 128]

But the crucial misrepresentation, the one which gives him most difficulty and ambushes his progress to completeness, concerns Grace Nugent. Lady Dashfort's untruth in this regard typifies her abiding falsity, but while Colambre has been able to penetrate and repudiate her social façade (as well as that area of Irish life it is most closely attached to - Mrs. Raffarty, and through her the Garraghtys), he cannot quite accommodate the breach she makes in his emotional integrity. Eventually, of course, he does manage to heal the wound, with the assistance of Sir James Brooke and Count O'Halloran (for which service perhaps all their other deficiencies may be forgiven them⁴³). Grace Nugent, thus, represents the most distressing discovery of Colambre's Irish experience, the one which intensifies that sense of incompleteness which joining the army is intended to allay. That the army can perform such a function is argued by Count O'Halloran, who suggests that contemporary military life may be conceived of in terms of a community surrogate: "Every officer must now feel, besides this sense of collective importance, a belief that his only dependence must be on his own merit" [VI, 223], a sense and a belief which the Count contrasts with the army of bygone days, which in his account was run on lines reminiscent of the Rackrent dynasty's norms.

Yet if Colambre is capable of substantiating this sense, how does it inform his attitude to Grace Nugent? He treats her alleged bastardy in a completely conventional manner, namely with abhorrence. In doing so, of course, he is maintaining a sense of integrity. His integrity, after all, resides in his doing the right thing: this is evident in his readiness to submit himself to the experience of being an absentee. This readiness may be uncharacteristic of those whose social milieu he shares, but in this way its propriety is asserted. In acquitting himself of absenteeism Colambre is not acting

radically - the order he is intent on restoring to Ireland is the old order, nourished by new zeal. And, as already noted, one of the functions of his course of action is to reveal the deviance of novelty, the untenability of new departures (as well as to bring to our attention the intriguing, but largely unexplored, connection which Edgeworth implies between the comic and the dissolute). Further, as may be inferred from preceeding remarks on the momentum of encounter generated by the novel, Colambre learns the true lessons of absenteeism by noting and tacitly comparing the various modes in which adequacy of social presence is articulated. In a word, it may be said that it is Colambre's promptness of mind - a term intended to embrace both his trained and ratified intellectual capacity and his (perhaps unimaginative) willingness to abide by its findings - which brings his experience of absenteeism as a social phenomenon to a successful conclusion. Yet it is the very rigour of this exemplary intelligence which provides him with a readymade means of refusing to countenance Grace. And in attempting to, in effect, accede to the nullification of presence which bastardy seems to connote, he is failing to achieve fullness of presence in his own right. Grace Nugent, thus, becomes the ultimate term of absenteeism. In a most ironic echo of his original intention to restore the honour of his family he can only, with regard to his beloved, describe his frame of mind as a determination, 'cost what it would, to act honourably' [VI, 212]. This resolve, which governs his decision to serve in Spain (a decision which evinces from Grace a surprised, "are you not going to Ireland - home - with us?" (ibid)), is merely the distillation of an attitude reasoned out earlier:

The more his heart felt that it was painful, the more his reason told him it was necessary, that he should part from Grace Nugent. To his union with her there was an obstacle which his prudence told him ought to be insurmountable; yet he felt that, during the few days he had been with her...he had, with his utmost power over himself, scarcely been master of his passion, or capable of concealing its object. [VI, 203]

Union denied divides Colambre. On revealing his decision to serve abroad - to remove himself from Ireland, that significantly problematic area, and seek to identify himself with another, not so obviously constructive area - he also declares his love to Grace, and expresses the terms of such a separation:

"Yes, I will merit my esteem and your own - by actions, not words: and I will give you the strongest proof, by tearing myself from you at this moment." [VI, 213]

Several key terms are contained in this little speech. Before examining them, however, it is perhaps worth noting our hero's emotional assertiveness, which can hardly be said to have characterised his previous sentimental involvements. Here, he is not taken in, as he was by Isabel Dashfort even though, at the beginning of this exchange, 'Never had she [Grace] appeared to him so attractive' [VI, 212]. In addition we should bear in mind that there is a larger sense in which this wrench means that things are going badly wrong for Colambre. His status as an exemplar, as a model of integrity, means surely that his function is integrative, not divisive. Self-denial, on a scale presented here, counteracts this function.

To return to the key terms: 'merit' anticipates Count O'Halloran's use of the term, quoted above, in speaking of the army; 'actions, not words' echoes the motto on Sir James Brooke's seal, the impress of which Colambre notices when visiting one of the Count's worthy neighbours.⁴⁴ In echoing the terms of his friends -

both of whom aspire to the status of mentor without entirely convincing us that they have achieved it, since doing so would needlessly attenuate Colambre's latent capacity for self-possession (latent that is in particular Irish contexts) - our hero expresses, but considers himself unable to avail of, their truly integrative currency. Indeed it is at this juncture of the novel that deeds assert their importance - particularly in the revelation of the truth about Grace - and words merely convey information, or to put that another way, become a gloss on deeds. (This also is the status they obtain to in Larry Brady's letter.)

It can be seen that one of the most important functions of the Grace Nugent problem is to focus on integrative agencies, the two representatives of which are the Irish Count and the English gentleman. Their capacities in such a role have hitherto been problematic in the novel. If, as has been argued,

The central issue of the book is whether Colambre should settle in Ireland; the evidence in favour of staying is both substantiated and undermined by his own observations and the admissions of other characters.⁴⁵

- then the most persuasive of these characters are Count O'Halloran and Sir James Brooke. But, as Dr. McCormack goes on to demonstrate, neither of these has a firm footing in Irish reality. They both, however, provide Colambre with access to experiences which are crucial to socialisation, to the abolition of his absenteeism. It is by the stimulus of this duo's principles that Colambre ventures further into the heart of Ireland, not on the basis of their experiences, and in venturing further he enters into a primacy of experiences which Edgeworth deems it unnecessary to exemplify. The ultimate term of such primacy, the realm of it which so closely affects him is the Grace Nugent question, the importance of which he can only offset with

danger to himself (neatly implied by his taking up military service). The Count and Sir James are careful not to pre-empt their young friend's Irish experiences by being denied appropriate contexts in which to locate them. Such a denial, indeed, reveals the component of absenteeism around which their status is conceived.

We can agree that their influence in Ireland may be considered misleading, or at least lacking in that completeness which a fully-fledged mentor might be expected to possess. This has the effect of allowing Colambre to confront one social irregularity after another, but this has to be the case, since each confrontation sooner or later clarifies and stabilises his qualities of social awareness. Ireland, considered in the context of an analysis of absenteeism, is first and foremost a public place, and the incompleteness of such a view is consistently argued for by the fact that the energies devoted to articulating a claim on public status, and on that alone, subvert access to inward, private considerations. It is very revealing, for example, that information concerning Grace, which Colambre might very well have received from the Count, is denied by the pure arbitrariness of contingency which is the most striking characteristic of the Irish scene:

Perhaps, notwithstanding our hero's determination to turn his mind from every thing connected with the idea of Miss Nugent, some latent curiosity about the burial-place of the Nugents might have operated to make him call upon the count. In this hope he was disappointed; for a cross miller, to whom the abbey-ground was let, on which the burial-place was found, had taken it into his head to refuse admittance, and none could enter his ground.
[VI, 126]

(Undoubtedly this circumstance additionally reveals how remote the count is from his community.) Denied the knowledge - and, conforming with the rationalistic cast of Colambre's mind, it is knowledge that

is crucially missing at this juncture - Colambre has no alternative but listlessly to pursue his mission:

His views and plans were altered: he had looked forward to the idea of marrying and settling in Ireland, and then every thing in the country was interesting to him; but since he had forbidden himself to think of a union with Miss Nugent, his mind had lost its object and its spring; he was not sufficiently calm to think of the public good; his thoughts were absorbed by his private concern. [VI, 128]

Yet it is this 'loss' which provokes his assumption of a disguise, which in turn leads to the dramatic confrontation in which he assumes command of his absenteeism. Such signal success, originating in listlessness, is clearly not all Colambre wants. Union with Grace Nugent is, in his view, the only available means of enlarging upon it. To do this, both her and his own domicile in England must be made untenable. It is fitting, therefore, that in England Count O'Halloran and Sir James Brooke come into their own.

They do so by embodying, in an English context, active and well-grounded principles. Sir James is no longer 'a professional (and therefore itinerant) soldier,'⁴⁶ but a married man settled on his Huntingdonshire estate. His having exchanged soldiering for squirearchy anticipates Colambre's fate (his objectivity regarding Dublin was a model disposition with which Colambre could identify). The Count, too, has changed. He no longer exemplifies 'a world and a style which is politically and economically unviable,'⁴⁷ but advances an ethic of duty and engagement. England is the location of both these transformations, both of which illustrate the two senses of union presented in the novel, namely the personal-emotional and the social, and these senses are seen as necessarily collaborative in bringing fully into being the new type that Colambre is destined to

be, the reformed absentee. This collaboration is also, of course, a model of a larger structure of Union, that between Ireland and England, the promise of which absenteeism denies.

Colambre, precisely because he is destined to be a new man (by Edgeworth) is the beneficiary of this collaboration. He is able to associate himself with the momentum which the fortuitous means of explanation regarding Grace sets in motion. But if access to this explanation comes as the result of an accident, its form is codified and expository - a will - which is in keeping with Colambre's frame of mind, as well as Edgeworth's.

A workable union, then, is the answer provided by The Absentee to the questions raised by Castle Rackrent. It is fitting that the effect of a viable relationship between identity and community, and a reinvigorated sense of life on the land which derives from it, should receive its final expression in a letter from one who will undoubtedly benefit from it, and that Larry Brady's letter has echoes of the tone of Thady Quirk.

(iv) Ormond

Edgeworth's fourth, and in terms of scope, her most substantial Irish novel is a recapitulation of the themes and tendencies of her earlier ones. A case for its being a recapitulation may be based on the following observations, but it may be noted also that such a description emphasises once more the problematic of development characteristic of the quartet of novels under consideration, which problematic is also at the heart of each of them and provides their fictional dynamic.

The most obvious link between Ormond and its forerunners is the one formed by comparing their heroes and Harry Ormond.

Indeed the fact that this novel's title refers to a character, whereas those of the others referred to conditions, is, as I will argue, one of the principal reasons for considering this final Irish novel as a recapitulation. Like his antecedents, Harry Ormond has family problems. In Castle Rackrent, family problems denoted the nature of the larger problem. And it may be argued that in both Ennui and The Absentee the degree of alienation from parental influence experienced by both Glenthorn and Colambre is the basis for their Irish experiences. The nature of the latter, in turn, may be assessed by noting the impact of the extra-parental influences to which Ireland gives both heroes access.

Harry Ormond is ostensibly worse off than any of his predecessors, with the possible exception of the parentless Rackrents, since he is an orphan. In other words, there are no naturally determining influences operating upon him. Instead, he is prey to rival influences - those of his uncle Sir Ulick O'Shane (his guardian, a more adept and more sophisticated representative of that phalanx of time-servers of which Sir Terence O'Fay, as we've noted, was also a member), Corny O'Shane (Harry's other uncle, 'King' of the Black Islands, and upholder of the novel's native interest), and Lady Annaly, a rather marmoreal lady-bountiful (Sir Ulick's neighbour and embodiment of the English interest). These three different influences compete for Harry's attachment, obliging him to make careful discriminations between what it is of value each of this important trio contains in the struggle he has to control 'all the faults that were incident to his natural violence of passions' [IX, 235]. It must be noted that each of those named mediate their influence through a distinctive family structure in the three preceeding novels, thereby bearing out the significance ascribed to such a structure in the three preceding works.

Unlike his predecessors, Harry Ormond has no fortune (or at least doesn't discover that his father, who died in India, has left him one until key phases of his education have been completed). Added to the fact that he is an orphan, this places an onus of self-reliance upon him from the outset. Glenthorn and Colambre, we remember, have this onus thrust on them by degrees. Nevertheless, it is a condition for which they consistently, if perhaps unthinkingly, argue. In their eventual assumption of it they resemble Ormond, and in the tentativeness of thus assuming he resembles them. Moreover, in all three cases, money as such is not the issue but rather the weaving together of different strands of experience into a durable strand of moral fibre which denotes the nature of his claim to our attention.

Thirdly, as will be seen in more detail below, Ormond falls in love inappropriately, an experience which, as in previous cases, proves to be the axis for a final and decisive turning point in his career. The possibility of self-willed misalliance proves yet again - we recall Condy Rackrent tossing a coin to decide whom to marry - the inexpediency of using the guidance of the ego. In other words, discarding the machinations of the ego, acting in obedience to the way in which the world describes its values, admitting to oneself the ability to accommodate and discriminate between designs alternative to one's own, once again provide a basis for that definitive Irish relationship, as proposed by Edgeworth, that between identity and community. To this relationship Ormond implicitly aspires, in common with Edgeworth's other young men, partly because the need to map out repeatedly its terms is the author's besetting imaginative intention in all four Irish novels, and partly also because it is the relationship above all others which, in works devoted to conceiving

of personal and social relatedness as twin facets of a common problematic, at once crystallises and resolves that problematic.

These three reasons go some way towards identifying Ormond not as an extension of Edgeworth's fictional range but as a more detailed presentation of it than that previously offered. In conforming to the hero-type found in her earlier Irish novels, Harry Ormond and his career may be readily accepted as merely embodying a recapitulation of the norms whereby type and career are re-enacted. But, as has already been argued, a more precise characterisation of the Edgeworth Irish canon, and one which each Irish novel exemplifies, is the fact that it is related to yet distinct from the author's oeuvre. Each Irish novel, then, offers a distinct perspective on an unchanging question, the how? which lurks behind the posited desideratum, life on the land. Her final Irish novel's distinct perspective is that accruing to the fact that her hero is Irish. Indeed, it's been argued that in Ormond 'Maria Edgeworth got closer to understanding the Irish mind...than anywhere else.'⁴⁸ Here, in other words, she dwells more centrally on the polarities of Irish society, polarities which in effect embrace two distinct and unrelated versions of Irish society. To say that they are unrelated may seem to distort the facts as they are presented in Ormond. The two poles in question are those represented by crude, warmhearted King Corny and by sly, debonair Sir Ulick. These two are brothers. The conditions and demeanours they exemplify have a common parentage. But, as the novel makes clear in the meeting between the two, the relationship is nominal, and, in addition, the influence of each biases Harry first one way and then another, either way being a way of incompleteness. Moreover it is Harry who benefits from the fact of this relationship, taking refuge with Sir Corny at the duplicitous behest of his guardian.

Neither brother is able to effect a synthesis between the ways each of them embodies: both die. In placing the hero between these two dominating influences (the English dimension, represented by Lady Annaly, is of crucial ideological importance, as we shall see, but, perhaps by virtue of the fictional intractability of ideological interest, this character - for all practical purposes, Harry's self-appointed foster-mother - has none of the colour or vivacity of the O'Shanes), the novel confers a status upon him which no other character in the novel possesses. Not only does his orphanhood imply that he is without natural guides to his identity, but the place he occupies is a clear indication of his having no natural community. It is to this double interlocking deficiency that he is born.

The fact that he is born into it also represents a shift in emphasis. In previous cases, the sense of deficiency gradually dawned on the protagonists (or, in the case of Castle Rackrent, ironically refused to, thereby acquiring a rhetorical insistence, much more blatant than that which mere editorialising might have given rise to, that it should). Once admitted, this sense becomes the basis for an exercise in restoration undertaken by the hero in which the world obligingly participates - typically, the world is synonymous with areas which themselves were never under threat of decay but rather have been sustained by the inertia of their own complaisance. For Edgeworth, the name of this world is England. Harry Ormond is given more to do than either of his lordly predecessors. But the nature of what he has to do hasn't changed. By dwelling to such a considerable extent on Irish conditions, by making ~~her~~ hero so obviously their offspring, Edgeworth is presenting a more comprehensive, more elaborately diagrammatic account of her besetting theme. But she is only extending and developing her range of reference. An account

of the preconditions for life on the land is still her central preoccupation, not a depiction of an enactment of that life.

The final reason for describing Ormond as a recapitulation is its historical perspective. It will be recalled that Castle Rackrent dealt with Ireland before 1782, and its successors are set in the immediate post-Union period. Arguably, the years between 1782 and 1800, when the Act of Union was passed are much more decisive from the point of view of anyone with an avowed Irish interest than either of the other periods. In these years, which also saw Maria Edgeworth settle down in Ireland and mature to womanhood, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy declared its faith in a brand of radical Unionism, the prototype of future Home Rule petitions and agitations. They also saw the decline of this movement, culminating in the twin traumas of the 1798 rebellion and the Act of Union. The second of these traumas Edgeworth marginally notes in the account of Sir Ulick's decline, but decline as such is not at all the burden of the novel, much less its accelerating agent, violence. By setting Ormond in this period, however, Edgeworth is implicitly renewing her emphasis on the need for a new Irish type to emerge, and with him a new world, made up of the strengths of the inherited situation, while discarding its essentially self-inflicted deficiencies. Yet, by employing this backward look, the main significance of which may be appreciated by bearing in mind the historical context which sharpens its focus, Edgeworth is evading the ongoing present, an evasion which does not characterise the other Irish novels. Historical perspective was employed in Castle Rackrent in order to repudiate the norms of a decaying order and to draw attention to the potential of a new day. But that potential was never realised. Edgeworth is confined to reasserting it, ignoring the problematic circumstances which attended its birth and which, increasingly, came to characterise its existence.

In Ormond the past is regarded fondly, unironically, but, by a paradox which Edgeworth declined creatively to accommodate, such a view constrains her vision even in the very act of allowing it expression. By saying that her final Irish novel is a detailed recapitulation of all her thoughts on Ireland, we are merely highlighting the singularity and consistency of that thought, these terms denoting a state of mind to which her heroes, not least of them Harry Ormond, seem bound to aspire and which, in achieving their desired union, eventually command. Not surprisingly, in later years Maria Edgeworth was writing:

It is impossible to draw Ireland as she now is in a book of fiction - realities are too strong, party passions too violent to bear to see, or care to look at their faces in the looking-glass. The people would only break the glass, and curse the fool who held the mirror up to nature - distorted nature, in a fever. We are in too perilous a case to laugh, humour would be out of season, worse than bad taste.⁴⁹

Ormond has been described as portraying 'the adventures of an Edgeworthian Tom Jones.'⁵⁰ Certainly its hero has certain traits in common with Fielding's young man - high-spirited, magnanimous, unself-conscious, endowed with a natural integrity and good faith which the world may attempt to undermine but never really can. But Harry Ormond's good nature is not so much a good in its own right as the basis upon which he is elevated into a type. As has been argued, 'Irish-English',⁵¹ Ormond is a man of two worlds, but finally he unites the best of both. This harmonious resolution is of a different order from that which completes Tom Jones: that particular hero is not a cultural exemplar.

As by now we have come to expect, the sense of what Maria Edgeworth is attempting in fiction (as opposed to the obiter dicta with which the dramatic material is interlarded and, as she evidently felt, justified) comes not from the intrinsic, though inevitably

recondite, interest by the Irish material as such, but from the unification of this material with that pertaining to the world beyond Ireland, a world of modern principles and judicious (in general, imbued with an institutionally-derived confidence: the law, the army) practices to which Ireland must make itself available if the characteristics of fecklessness, dilapidation and unthinkingness are not to gain more decisively entropic hold. History tells us that Ireland in Edgeworth's time was in a position of being denied access to the modern world on the country's own terms, was (in general, considering the populace's point of view) grudging in its acceptance of the terms offered, and inhibited from materialising its own version of the modern spirit. As in Ireland's relationship with the Roman Empire, so with regard to the impact of the Renaissance, and also with another major European turning-point. At any rate, in this recapitulatory novel, Ireland as a cultural entity is just about done for. It's divided, but the parts don't relate, blinded by venality on the one hand and ignorance on the other. 'King' is clearly an ironical honorific. Corny O'Shane's domain is eccentric; a law unto itself, perhaps, but essentially vulnerable by being remote and unique. The introduction of characters representative of the new modes' superficialities causes dislocation. The reader may be tempted to see this outcome paralleled by Corny's acquaintance with the gun, the cause of his accidental death, and sourly conclude that the genial old duffer should have stuck to the slingshot. Castle Hermitage, Sir Ulick's domain, is an example of the modern world in its Irish manifestation, as glittering and corrupt on its own scale as anything to be found in metropolitan France, and in fact a forcing-house of opportunism and related varieties of callow values.

To the untenability of both these versions of Irish establishment Harry Ormond bears witness. He attends their demise, and unwittingly becomes the beneficiary of their going. For all his spiritedness he becomes the exemplar of the middle way, the ideal inhabitant of a new community, the newness residing in its amenability to accommodating his self-possession, his sense of identity. The problem raised by Ormond (and its two immediate Irish predecessors) is, What is the basis for the hero's winning through? Clearly it is not only his reactions to the limiting Irish contexts. Some countervailing influence must be opposed to these, particularly since his reactions are enforced, and do not arise naturally: Sir Ulick would make a plaything of him, King Corny a playboy. Harry's spiritedness, his predisposition to experience which, presumably, is all a (naturally guideless) orphan might hope to live by, is a species of redundant freedom, subject to the same whims and pitfalls as the demeanour of Sir Ulick and King Corny. What Harry needs is discipline, and we need to isolate the source of this requirement, the values which it articulates, in order to appreciate the issues at stake in the evolution of a 'natural man' to a position where he can inhabit a self and accept the model of world which such an attainment implies.

What the foregoing amounts to is a reminder that the problematic elements of Edgeworth's Irish novels are not the problematic areas of the world she is depicting. Her scenes of dilapidation, misconception, inappropriate social gesture are all very ably conveyed, possessing a force in their own right as well as carrying their full weight as salient elements in romans à thèse. The scenes, characters, and role in the plot representing the countervailing, restorative, coherent mode strike us as very thin by comparison. The characters (with perhaps the honourable exception of Lady Geraldine

in Ennui) are marmoreal and too well defined, their contexts may have a pleasing ease and space, but the sense of ease seems, rather unhealthily, the product of ritualised, over-rehearsed social occasions, and the space evacuated. More illuminating still is the secondary role these elements play in the plot. Deterioration of one kind or another is invariably our starting point. It predates restoration, and has to achieve maximum expression (that is, has to enmesh the hero to a seemingly inescapable degree) before restoration can begin to gain ground. The secondary status of the restorative mode seems to identify it as a possibility only. Those who embody it do so most influentially as a possibility, its justification lying not in their possession of it but in the hero's identification with it. We never encounter it as anything else, since its representatives never experience the senses of jeopardy and search which animate the hero. By virtue of its being well-integrated and self-sufficient, it is remote from and indeed at odds with fiction's other, more zestful domain. True-born, all it requires is the life the hero confers on it by regarding it as a means of ratifying and consolidating his identity. (As we can see, possibility materialises itself in terms of land.) Nevertheless, what must be seen as the main strength of Edgeworth's position, is the source of unsuccessful fictional articulation, and as such, the main reason for the imbalance which characterises her Irish novels. Ormond offers the opportunity of investigating the reasons for this, and its repercussions.

The source of Harry's discipline is plain to see: Lady Annaly - or, bearing in mind that our hero opts for the middle road, England (mid-point, in Edgeworth's day, between Ireland and France). Its nature is also explicit, or at least obtains to

tenable, objective forms though its very integrity is perhaps the feature which most crucially undermines its fictional viability: its nature is explicitly educational. Yet here we immediately come upon a difficulty. In this first private colloquy at the bedside of Moriarty Carroll, Lady Annaly is inviting Harry to be led by her guiding hand, but to do so on his own merits.

"....I will tell you sincerely, that, on some occasions, when we met in Dublin, I perceived traits of goodness in you, which, on your own account, Mr. Ormond, have interested me in your fate. But fate is an unmeaning commonplace - worse than commonplace - word: it is a word that leads us to imagine that we are fated or doomed to certain fortunes or misfortunes in life. I have had a great deal of experience, and, from all I have observed, it appears to me that far the greatest part of our happiness or misery in life depends upon ourselves." [IX, 256]

Whatever her ladyship's experiences have been we may only surmise. Her function now is evidently not to experience further but to harness and direct the capacity of others. No wonder Harry, when he first hears of her interest, announced at the outset of her visit, is somewhat incredulous. And indeed it would appear to be a function of his naiveté and undeveloped consciousness that he precipitately accedes to her interest: 'Since there exists a being, and such a being, interested in me, I must be worth something.' (ibid). At this point the novel virtually comes to an end. We are told that Ormond will never efface the impressions of this encounter, he will simply exhaust the available alternatives to Lady Annaly's influence. The only remaining interest derives from the pitfalls and tribulations which may distract our hero from his path: 'His biographer...deems it a point of honour to extenuate nothing; but to trace with impartial hand, not only every improvement and advance, but every deviation or retrograde movement' [IX, 257]. The most serious

independent-minded and potentially interesting of these is Harry's flight to Paris, but its occasion is trivial in the extreme. His hasty conclusion that Florence Annaly has spurned him is the result of an unavoidable, and so forgivable, misreading of the situation. This incident does not reveal to Harry that he has the wherewithal to reject her. Perhaps by this time he doesn't: King Corny is dead, he is alienated from Sir Ulick, Paris is the last resort. He has become Annaly property because he knows no better (the novel contains nothing better to be known: a means of assessing the Annaly value is provided by the assumption that value is commensurate with lack of complication).

The main reason that Harry doesn't know better, and can only go through a parody of self-discipline (by, immediately after the initial colloquy, drawing up a list of four behavioural do's and don'ts) is that he is almost entirely a recipient, seldom an initiator. When he tries to express himself freely, this is presented as an unchecked release of his passionate nature, which inevitably offends against the codes and threatens the value-system of the particular context in which he finds himself (in which he has been involuntarily placed). These unpremeditated offences are the reason for his removal to the Black Isles, for his failure to abide by the principles of the list while there, for his challenge to White Connal, and his flight to Paris. He is in continual need of rescue. Yet it is not Lady Annaly who does the rescuing, but the favourable operation of contingency acting in conjunction with his own compliance. Thus, despite her ladyship's repudiation of fate, it has a disproportionately influential part to play in the bringing about of her dear boy's conformity. This is evidenced in the fortuitous manner of Lady Annaly's own presence at Castle Hermitage,

the deaths of White Connal and King Corny, the meetings with Abbé Morellet and Moriarty Carroll. It is true that Harry makes himself available to a variety of experiences, which entails a predisposition to respond to whatever comes his way, but these attributes reveal the dangerous scope of his indiscriminating consciousness, over which he can exert little or no mastery. What impresses him is the rhetoric of possibility, which is not surprising, since this is what informs the intellectual underpinnings of his biography. But it hardly seems to matter who the rhetorician is. He is willing to abide by Lady Annaly's reading of him. Yet in the incident leading to his departure to France, it is Sir Ulick's reading that proves decisive. Referring to Florence, and invoking the breadth of his own experience, Sir Ulick declares, "my life upon it, the moment she hears you are gone, she will wish you back again!" [IX, 464]. Harry, without Lady Annaly, is a character who anticipates the wild young men of Carleton and Lever - for example, Phelim O'Toole and Tom Burke. The former tries to exploit the social vulnerability of the neighbourhood and comes to a bad end; the latter is thrust into the maelstrom of history, and only obtains a sense of identity by finally retreating into private life. Both young men, crucially, are landless: their careers are eccentric to community values. (Perhaps, as his intention to exchange the Black Isles for the army reveals, Harry Ormond is more the prototype of a Lever hero than a Carleton: his choice of career is a mark of his alienation. But then the fact that no career, other than that of a prankster, is open to Phelim O'Toole is arguably a still greater degree of alienation.)

King Corny orders his succession in a drunken pact: Sir Ulick connives his way to ruin, leaving a successor (Marcus) whose fate is beyond even this comprehensive novel's frame of reference.

Harry Ormond has no alternative but Lady Annaly. Her importance, as already noted, is primarily ideological. But this ideology is given objective form, namely life on the Annaly estate. In other words, the most crucial expression of her importance is the fact that she has evolved a version of life on the land. Her self-possession and ideological awareness is the source and motivating power of the life exemplified by her children: the generous rule of Sir Herbert and the alluring selflessness of Florence. In other words, the community which Lady Annaly possesses incorporates, and is an expression of, the principal elements of her identity (her initial approach to Ormond, we recall, blended altruism with discipline).

But what life on the land means is not life in a complex, problematic sense (as Harry has been experiencing it hitherto), but life as a sequence of exemplary enactments. It is a balanced, controlled system of proofs: the Annaly family motto must surely be quod erat demonstrandum. While we may rightly feel disturbed by Marcus O'Shane's attitudes to the peasantry ('the natives, as he termed them in derision. He spoke to them as if they were slaves: he considered them as savages.' [IX, 425]), what of Sir Herbert Annaly's attitude? A recently converted absentee, 'By the sacrifice of his own immediate interest, and by great personal exertion, strict justice, and a generous and well-secured system of reward, Sir Herbert already had produced a considerable change for the better in the morals and habits of the people' [IX, 432]. Yet despite the vicious ways they are obliged to keep, Sir Ulick's tenants have an affection for him. We never hear of the Annaly peasants' attitude to their landlord; it is evidently sufficient that they do. They have no resources to withstand the innovator's influence: 'the best of the

set were merely idle fishermen' [IX, 431]. Clearly Sir Ulick's tenants are to be considered misguided in their loyalties. We are to infer that the freedom they possess is not worth having. The point is not that we might desire them to be entitled to their wasteful, unstructured way of life but that life in that manifestation is typical of the national ethic, articulating an incompleteness which has a parallel in the Black Isles scheme of things. As such it provides a gloss on Harry's own background, offering a set of examples antithetical to those provided by Sir Herbert's firm administration. Again, it is not so much what Annaly does on his own account that occupies our attention, but the fact that Harry is impressed by it. Of course what Sir Herbert does must be an influential model to Ormond: its very success guarantees that. But it is success which is stressed, not really practice as such. The voice of peasant confusion gives an air of actuality to the O'Shane estate which life at Annaly doesn't have.

Another demonstration of Annaly good faith is the local school, attended by Catholic and Protestant children alike with the sanction of their respective pastors. Again, it is the existence of the school, and that it exists is in part due to the enlightened attitude of both Florence and Lady Annaly towards it, that commands attention, not what the school actually does. Like the estate itself, it is an emblem of potential cultural coherence. But just as the estate is vulnerable to the negativity embodied by its neighbour, so the benefit of the school may be offset by the disruptive influence of anyone who doesn't identify with its progressive spirit. The establishment of the school is an inherently altruistic gesture, the product of personalities who, like Sir Herbert, do not

live for the sake of their own experience but for the sake of channelling the experience of others. We do not find in Edgeworth a boisterous depiction of a hand-to-mouth, somewhat scatterbrained hedge-school education, such as Carlton presents. On the contrary, we have a decorous and confident articulation of the need for education.

The disruptive character in this instance is a certain Mrs. M'Crule (née Black!), inevitably a former intimate of Sir Ulick. Her main objection is to the school's non-sectarian ethic. In order to justify the vulnerable pupil's entitlement to attend the school, Ormond has to vindicate the school's existence, and this can only be done by identifying with its principles. Since the Annalys support the school and defend it against Mrs. M'Crule, by sharing in that defence, Harry is implicitly identifying with the Annaly ethic. And this has repercussions for other areas of his identity: 'It was an auspicious circumstance for Ormond's love that Florence had now a daily object of thought and feeling in common with him' [IX,449] - namely the fate of Tommy Dunshaughlin. The particular circumstance which crystallises Mrs. M'Crule's objections concerns the presentation of this pupil for examination; that is, for his public legitimisation. Tommy passes with flying colours. Florence is 'radiant with benevolent pleasure' (ibid). Ormond responds to this enhancement: 'his looks expressed his feelings so strongly, that Florence, suddenly abashed, could scarcely finish her speech' (ibid). The influence of social structure on personal development is plain enough, but this should not detract from the specialised and unique sense of social structure presented. In other words, it is the exemplary force of the experience which is

important, not is normative value. Indeed, social experience must be of an exemplary and rarefied nature if it is to have its desired effect on Harry. We can see that the desired effect is twofold: on the one hand Annaly life should counteract Harry's inherited influences - these being both socially deleterious and unable properly to accommodate, or make fruitful, his generosity of spirit. (Sir Ulick's social realm cannot be united with the more natural graces - themselves not amenable to social discipline - expressive of life in King Corny's domain.) On the other hand, since the main bearing of Lady Annaly's concern for Harry is on his identity, the nature of the exemplary occasions must be couched in terms of appeals to his largeness of spirit, his better self, his presumed amenability to the correct way. In keeping with this orientation, the example of Sir Herbert, powerfully instructive though it may be, is less obvious in its immediate impact than an appeal to his affections. It is the inner Ormond whom we've seen engaged and problematic throughout the novel, not the social man. Indeed, the latter has no scope. The novel admits this, ending in a bequest to the hero of a sphere of legitimate operations. As in Ormond's predecessors, the existence of such a sphere is never in doubt. What remains in question are the terms upon which it may be profitably occupied.

It is possible to see the ending of all three post-Union Edgeworth Irish novels as either expressions of a naive faith in the righteousness of the author's standpoint or as touching expressions of solidarity with the most abused and perplexed section of the populace, the peasantry. The dogmatism, which is the most consistent characteristic of her prose, is intended to serve both functions. Not only must a value-system be asserted, but it must be seen to have beneficiaries. But the necessarily backward condition of the

latter, which is absolutely faithful to the life of the period, is a precondition for the assertion of the former. In Ormond, as elsewhere, the hero's struggle is for mind, for a quantifiable amount of benevolence, for the lineaments of enabling perceptions, for known and objectively-derived standards of integrity. Self-possession, the learned coincidence of mind and what the world demands of it, is a model of the hard-won, well-defined estate where life can now coherently take place uninterrupted, obedient only to an enactment of that network of judicious associations which the landlord brings to bear on it. The political implications of this projection are ignored. Indeed, Edgeworth seems to argue that the national question, for example, is irrelevant, not to mention the existence of other social institutions equal, if not superior, in importance to the Big House. For her, evidently, projected attainment was all. The projection is undoubtedly objective, and Ormond has been censured for 'the magic resolution toward which the novel has moved: Ormond's inheritance of the old Gaelic chieftain's moral authority. It is a resolution so impossible of acceptance that it becomes a mocking epitaph.'⁵² But far from being 'magic', the resolution is supported by the best that Edgeworth knew, her (or, more accurately, her father's) pedagogic principles. Rather than simply an epitaph, the resolution also announces the possibility of a new start. And though Harry Ormond is the locus of resolution, the final perspective of the novel is that provided by Lady Annaly, who 'gloried in the full accomplishment of her prophecies' [IX, 528].

In making the intellectual underpinnings of her vision so plain, and in offering a comprehensive enactment of her beliefs, Edgeworth obliges us to regard her final Irish novel as a recapitulation. But in this way she also reveals her own limitations. For her, fiction

is not a reality in its own right, governed by its own necessities, but is offered as the real, articulated in terms of non-fictional principles. Sound as these principles might be, they are not finally a source of fictional credibility. We have to trust the teller, not the tale. Even in the very act of invoking objective, supposedly scientific models of mind, the subjectivity of the fiction is revealed. Yet the fact that Edgeworth thought fiction to be a source of answers is revealing in its own right. It gained her the plaudits of contemporary critics, 'having done more good than any other writer, male or female, of her generation.'⁵³ It seems hardly necessary to note at this point that her contribution to the development of the novel is of some importance, and her place in literary history secure. Yet the uniqueness of her contribution, for which her Irish novels are largely responsible, also reveals the uniqueness of her situation: an incisive mind living in a country which could not productively take possession of itself or properly articulate its own energies (the Edgeworth estate has been likened to an 'oasis'⁵⁴). The pressure to argue for that which she, through her father's training, represented was keenly felt, and it can hardly be thought that she regarded such an undertaking as a limitation. By articulating her own consciousness she expressed the general possibility of attaining to consciousness. The confidence with which she presumed that such a possibility was a precordition of mastery over an ostensibly intractable situation may be seen, in hindsight, to be flimsy. In fact, such epistemological legerdemain contrasts strongly with - indeed vitiates - its basis, namely the questioning, experimental nature of her novels' typical experiences. And indeed the history of her period shows how very few actually shared her confidence. In effect, the intervention of non-fictional mechanisms becomes in the last analysis the clearest

expression of the characteristic unevenness of her fiction. By compelling her novels to express a rationalisation, Maria Edgeworth (unwittingly, no doubt) identifies herself with the problematic of wholeness which her fiction is intended to anneal. Identity and community are the terms upon which a future might very well be based. But a future cannot be written about as such, it can only be projected, and the strength of the projection in Maria Edgeworth's Irish novels has the effect merely of illuminating the incoherence of the present, an incoherence so general and so grossly strident in its gestures that it cannot be abided, but merely opposed by an ideal, a desideratum, a necessarily fabricated solution.

4 Maria Edgeworth and Nineteenth Century Irish Fiction

By attempting to make a case for Ireland in fiction (the fiction residing most crucially and least adequately in the verdict she handed down on the case), Edgeworth created the possibility of Irish fiction. In deciding to use Ireland as one of her moral landscapes, she placed the country on the fictional map, showing it to be a locale in which the ethical concerns of the day could be presented. It is entirely legitimate to criticise Edgeworth for being contrived and programmatic in her presentation, but it is those very weaknesses which make her fiction characteristic and which denote its importance. Precisely by dwelling on the ethical, the socially viable, and on contemporary versions of the true and the good she was able to project her vision of Ireland; and by emphasising such concerns she could be sure of a receptive audience in the best circles. Thus, the case of Ireland earned a place for itself as a matter of contemporary interest and concern. Even if it may be argued that, thanks to its very integrity as an intellectually

apprehensible case, the country's actual condition was overlooked, it can hardly be doubted that, from the point of view of values of the mind, the beginning provided by Maria Edgeworth for Irish fiction was certainly auspicious. Part of its overall significance lies in the fact that it was a beginning. In other words, the statement of the case of Ireland, by virtue of the ostensible completeness with which Edgeworth accomplished it, proved impossible to repeat: simply in literary terms alone Carleton was quite correct to regard Miss Edgeworth as 'inimitable'.⁵⁵ Undoubtedly, the magnitude of her achievement made her work very influential. Yet an influence is inevitably reacted against as much as obeyed.

A sense of Edgeworth's importance may be obtained by bearing in mind that, considering her overall output, writing about Ireland does represent a decision. Our feeling of the limitations of her Irish works, and indeed of her fiction generally, is that they illustrate in much too definitive a manner the implementation of intellectually derived decisions, the result of a habit of mind brought into being prior to the work, not the product of imaginative confrontation with the material itself. A function of her training, obviously, was the instillation of confidence in it, and it seems to me that the various charges levelled against her by latter-day critics of complacency, patronage, disengagement and the rest,⁵⁶ derive from a feeling of exasperation that anybody could retain, and operate from, such unexamined confidence. That it did remain unexamined is, perhaps, expressive of her need for it, a need which comes from a different psychic zone - one which is never properly faced in her work. (Accompanying this observation is Stendhal's regret of Edgeworth's 'deliberate avoidance of love as a subject',⁵⁷ love being for Stendhal the novelist a crucial and ironic confrontation

of the self.) Edgeworth values were not attuned to scepticism. Perhaps by virtue of her training she is more closely related to the ethnographic and anthropological interests which distinguish Anglo-Irish intellectual endeavour in the pre-Famine period, interests which Lever's work implicitly sets out to rerudiate. Thus, it has been assumed that her works convey valuable information, but are in no sense adequate statements of value.

Such an assumption rejects the epistemological basis of Edgeworth's fiction, as well as the protagonists who are the fiction's enablers. For, as we've seen, it is the destiny of each protagonist - in the Irish fiction at least - to embody either ab ovo or by virtue of his experience, the author's own epistemological given, namely that of reviewing the evidence and reaching a judicious conclusion. The nature of this conclusion obviously validates the procedure invoked to produce it. The endings of the novels justify those experiences whose character, while being undergone, seemed to inhibit satisfactory conclusion, or indeed survival itself. Jeopardy becomes a criterion by which the value of endurance may be asserted. The challenge of reversal, wrong-turnings, distractions is vindicated by the resilience, and relative promptness, with which a new, more coherent (and, typically, more articulate) self responds. Trial and error ^{are} ~~are~~ legitimated by the unquestioned belief in an eventual solution. (In this latter regard, it is interesting to note that, in Edgeworth's fiction, the sense of duration is more pronounced than the sense of chronological time.) What all these structures of opposition indicate is that the central ideal of Edgeworth's fictional world is that of the self coalescing with the world, or, to return to the terms in which the ideal is set forth and which describe her fictional world's parameter, identity and

community may form a decisive relationship. The endings of the novels abolish the structure of oppositions which precedes ^{them}. The hero wins through. Antinomies of place and personality are resolved. That which experience has vouchsafed can now be safely envisaged - though not, as mentioned above, actually presented: the very confidence invested in this sense of the future undermines our acceptance of it, yet, in Edgeworth's view, it is strictly entailed by what, in retrospect, we may call the unscrambling of the past (a decisive enactment of 'freeing' Glenthorn, Colambre and Harry Ormond). This operation, in turn, leads to the sufficiency of the present, which is typically described in terms of consciousness of sufficiency, another verification of the epistemological method.

From whatever point of view, Maria Edgeworth's achievement in the field of Irish fiction is of immense significance. In order to evaluate it, however, some pressure must be placed on my use of 'ideal' above. To do this, we must question the basis for her confidence; by which I do not mean an examination of the principles upon which it is grounded, but of the tenability of such principles and of the effect on her fiction of her adhering to them. The basis for the principles governing her confidence are readily accessible, and derive from the intellectual training which her father provided and which the author herself cultivated. Their tenability as fixed points of principle is hardly remarkable; as such they seem neither more nor less tenable than any other code. That is, they are vulnerable to the same sorts of criticism as all such codes are; namely, rigidity, dogmatism, a sense that the purpose of life is to bear out one's beliefs about it, a certain callousness towards material that does not fit (an example of this, perhaps is Edgeworth's

unreasoned hostility to socially subversive Jews; her treatment of the Shylock-like Mr. Mordecai the coachmaker in The Absentee, and of the whole Jewish question in Harrington⁵⁸), and an unattractive righteousness. In other words, the most important features of a code may be its tendency to exclude and override. It may be that in drawing a precise map of a moral terrain which they could comfortably inhabit and make fertile, the Edgeworths, father and daughter, were articulating their sense of possessing the Edgeworthstown estate. The estate is 'the dear, blest place', the locale of their best selves; its efficiency as an organism, as a going concern (for which Maria assumed responsibility in later life), became, naturally, an expression of the principles of its managers. The world of the estate could become the world of the self, provided that there existed a predisposition towards such a coalescence. The integrity and, so to speak, self-sufficiency of the estate became a model of the self, a model which convinced by virtue of its offering a non-egocentric, objective means of productively supervising and facilitating the lives of others (the peasantry). The basis for Maria Edgeworth's confidence is, I suggest, a total identification of the requirements of a given situation with the promise that her principles (derived, we remember, from a source other than the given situation) could ameliorate the given. Understandable as this conclusion may be - and its not least impressive aspect is the consciousness with which she lived up to her findings - it does have one serious drawback which is synonymous with the main deficiency of her fiction, namely it enforces a degree of necessary evasion (Edgeworth's protagonists always manage to swerve out of harm's way). Her principles create, it seems, a counterprinciple which threatens to topple them, all the

more so for being itself evaded - much as a machine may damage itself, while operating, by generating heat which its housing can't absorb.

There are numerous instances of necessary evasion in both her life and work. Those in the works are easiest to catalogue: 'telling' instead of 'showing', insufficiently strong narrative connections between incidents, a preponderance of one-dimensional characters, a willed manipulation of plot. In her life, for the purpose of my argument here, the most significant evasion is contained in her assertion of a cultural position on too narrow a basis. This basis is, simply, the viable estate which, as history tells us, was the exception rather than the norm in nineteenth century Ireland. Such an assertion of the pleasures and benefits of the estate becomes, in her fiction, the property of the hero in the last analysis. He attains his ideal. This ideal, however, is identical with the author's confidence, a confidence so well-meshed and articulate (not to mention the support it received from the reading public and the legitimation accorded it by much of contemporary thought) that it could only express itself objectively as an ideal. The subjectivism of the idealising impetus must be remembered, however; and here, perhaps, we have the most significant clash of opposites, which Irish fiction for the following seventy years attempts to find a structure for with only an extremely limited degree of success.

The rift between what as an author Maria Edgeworth projected and that which in other roles she could confidently rationalise is obvious in her novels, projection and rationalisation being complementary in her fictional overview. I have tried above to indicate the complexity of this interrelationship, and tentatively to hint at its significance for Irish culture at this juncture (since Edgeworth's work appears at, and attempts to depict, a significant cultural

and historical turning point in Ireland). Obviously strong reasons may be advanced to diminish Edgeworth's position, depending on one's ideological convictions. I have preferred to present the Edgeworth position and its implications as fully as possible.

Maria Edgeworth's principal bequest to her artistic successors is her most problematic achievement, the projection of an ideal. Nobody in nineteenth century Ireland could fail to share it, yet their primary experience was of the difficulty in giving the ideal physical substance. From both an historical and literary point of view, the ideal was known by virtue of the stress occasioned by efforts to realise it. In literature, that stress is to be observed most readily in the fiction of William Carleton and Charles Lever.

FOOTNOTESCHAPTER I

- 1 Brian Simon, Studies in the History of Education 1780-1870 (London, Lawrence and Wishart, 1960), p.25.
- 2 'Crlandino' (Edinburgh, 1848) is a story with an Irish setting, written to raise money for famine relief.
- 3 Augustus J.C. Hare, Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth (London, Edward Arnold, 2 vols. 1894), II, p.19 (Hereafter cited as Hare, vol. and page numbers.)
- 4 Marilyn Butler, Maria Edgeworth. A Literary Biography (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972), p.413. (Hereafter cited as Butler, page number).
- 5 Butler deals with these matters fully, pp.271-304.
- 6 Thomas Flanagan, The Irish Novelists 1800-1850 (New York, Columbia University Press, 1954), p.66.
- 7 P.H. Newby, Maria Edgeworth (London, Arthur Barker, 1950), p.13.
- 8 R.L. and Maria Edgeworth, Memoirs of Richard Lovell Edgeworth, Esq. (London, [2 vols., 1820]; citations here are from the second, corrected editions, London, 2 vols., 1821), II, p.314. (Hereafter, Memoirs, vol. and page numbers.)
- 9 O. Elizabeth McWhorter Harden, Maria Edgeworth's Art of Prose Fiction (The Hague, Mouton, 1971), p.104, n.22
- 10 Simon, op.cit., pp.46-7.
- 11 Memoirs, II, p.323.
- 12 Quoted in Butler, p.269.
- 13 Cyril Connolly (ed.), Great English Short Novels (New York, 1955); quoted in James Newcomer, Maria Edgeworth the Novelist 1767-1849. A Centenary Study (Fort Worth, Texas Christian University Press, 1967), p.54.
- 14 Popular Tales (London, 3 vols., 1804).
- 15 Tales of Fashionable Life (vols. 1-3, London, 1809).
- 16 Butler, p.237.
- 17 A case is partially made for the deterioration of Edgeworth's style as a result of increasing didacticism by Joanne Altieri, 'Style and Purpose in Maria Edgeworth's Fiction', Nineteenth Century Fiction, Vol. 23, no.iii (Dec., 1968), pp.265-278.

- 18 R.L. Edgeworth's is said to have held that Hartley's theory of the association of ideas was 'the most coherent account yet... of the mind's reception and ordering of external impressions.' Butler, p.62.
- 19 These novels are to be found in Volumes IV, VI and IX, respectively of the Longford Edition of Maria Edgeworth's Tales and Novels (London, George Routledge, 10 vols., 1893). Citations will be followed by the relevant volume and page numbers.
- 20 George Saintsbury, The English Novel (London, Dent, 1913), p.183.
- 21 These remarks are contained in the general preface to the second series of Tales from Fashionable Life (London, 1812); ed.cit., Vol.V, p.237.
- 22 Walter Allen, The English Novel (London, Phoenix House, 1954), p.102.
- 23 In view of this narrowness, it is interesting to note that after the publication of Helen (1834) - that is, at virtually the end of her writing career - she admitted, 'I had often and often a suspicion that my manner was too Dutch, too minute...' Hare, II, p.249.
- 24 Flanagan, op.cit., p.67.
- 25 Stephen Gwynn, Irish Literature and Drama in the English Language (London, Nelson, 1936), p.52, quoting Emily Lawless, Maria Edgeworth (London, Macmillan, 1904).
- 26 Butler, pp.240-1.
- 27 Duane Edwards, 'The Narrator of Castle Rackrent', The South Atlantic Quarterly, Vol.71, no.1 (Winter, 1971-2), p.129.
- 28 Flanagan, op.cit., p.71.
- 29 Butler, p.357.
- 30 Butler, p.306.
- 31 Flanagan, op.cit., p.83.
- 32 Butler, p.272.
- 33 Butler, p.365.
- 34 Flanagan, op.cit., p.84.
- 35 Butler, p.375.
- 36 Flanagan, op.cit., p.85.
- 37 Butler, p.374.
- 38 Flanagan, op.cit., p.85.
- 39 ibid.

Footnotes - Chapter I (cont.)

- 40 Donald Davie, The Heyday of Sir Walter Scott (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), p.72.
- 41 Newby, op.cit., p.72.
- 42 Newcomer, op.cit., p.24.
- 43 These deficiencies are analysed by W.J. McCormack, 'The Absentee and Maria Edgeworth's notion of didactic fiction', Atlantis, Vol.5 (1973), pp.123-135.
- 44 The motto actually reads, 'deeds, not words' [VI, 127], and with Colambre's renewed acquaintance with it comes the information that his friend is to marry one of the admired Oranmores, the head of which family we have seen derided by Lady Clanbrony's guests as well as by Lady Dashfort.
- 45 McCormack, op.cit., p.129.
- 46 McCormack, op.cit., p.133 (his emphasis).
- 47 ibid (his emphasis).
- 48 Roger McHugh, 'Maria Edgeworth's Irish Novels', Studies, Vol.27 (December, 1938), p.567.
- 49 Hare, II, p.202.
- 50 Newby, op.cit., p.80.
- 51 Butler, p.387.
- 52 Flanagan, op.cit., p.99.
- 53 Francis Jeffrey, Review of Tales of Fashionable Life (1st series, 1809) in Edinburgh Review, Vol.14, no.28, p.378.
- 54 Michael Hurst, Maria Edgeworth and the Public Scene (London, Macmillan, 1969), p.47.
- 55 D.J. O'Donoghue, The Life of William Carleton (London, Downey, 2 vols., 1896), I, p.174. (Volume 1 contains Carleton's unfinished autobiography.)
- 56 For example, H.S. Krams, Irish Life in Irish Fiction (New York, Columbia University Press, 1903), pp.28-9.
- 57 Butler, p.395, n.3.
- 58 Harrington was written in response to charges of anti-Jewish sentiment (Butler, p.238).

CHAPTER II
WILLIAM CARLETON

1 Introduction

(i) Carleton and Edgeworth

Some of the questions raised by an attempt to assess the overall character of nineteenth century Irish fiction's portrayal of life on the land come sharply into focus through considering the nature of the literary relationship between Maria Edgeworth and William Carleton.

Traditionally, none has been thought to exist:

The author of 'The Traits and Stories'...was what only a few men have ever been or can ever be, the creator of a new imaginative world, the demiurge of a new tradition. He had no predecessors, for Miss Edgeworth wrote by preference of that section of Irish society which is, as the upper classes have seldom been anywhere, ashamed of even the little it had of national circumstance and character; and when she did take a man out of the Gaelic world and put into his mouth the immortal 'Memoirs of the Rackrent Family' it was as a poor man living in great men's houses, and not a poor man at his hearth and among his children. She could not have done otherwise, for she was born and bred among persons who knew nothing of the land where they were born, and she had no generations of historians, Gaelic scholars, and folk-lorists behind her, from whom to draw the symbols of her art.¹

Carleton's distinctiveness has also been emphasised by his modern biographer:

He was as far separated from that precision in word and idea [i.e. Castle Rackrent] as he was from Scott's great imaginative power of revivifying and recolouring the past...²

And his place in nineteenth century Irish fiction as a whole has been established in the following terms:

While Maria Edgeworth is a beginning, William Carleton is a culmination and the end of a literary movement. The contrast between them is a key to the understanding

of the whole period, a whole half century, for the story of the Irish novel dealing with landlordism begins in 1800 and by 1850 had pretty well run its course.³

My account of Carleton takes exception to each of these verdicts.

Of Carleton's singularity, there can be no doubt, and as I will shortly demonstrate its quality may indeed be most appropriately assessed in contrast to that of Maria Edgeworth. Yet striking as it is, it is not his most important aspect. On the contrary, given the sources of his art, the most significant thing about Carleton is the readiness to conform to established ideological positions. In other words, while it is very important not to overlook the raw material of his work, it is vital not to disregard the various metropolitan influences which he allowed to determine its final shape, and which provide it with its specific character. Whatever one may think of Carleton's earning access to publication by means of ideological affiliation, it is striking that after 1850, when national morale was at a low ebb in the aftermath of the Famine and the ideological ardour of the 1830s and '40s dissipated, Carleton produced no literary work with a claim to critical attention. It is potentially misleading therefore to stress his singularity and ignore those aspects of his career which lend to it a more interesting and more complex note of typicality. It is much more representative of Carleton's life and times to view his career as being related to but never wholeheartedly implicated with the intellectual Dublin of his day, to bring to the fore a note of irregularity analogous to that emerging from our characterisation of Maria Edgeworth's Irish novels. A quartet of novels is not, of course, the same as a literary career: my point at this stage is simply to underline a sense of ~~doubleness~~ in Carleton, a sense which, as we shall see, is all the more in evidence because of his ideological influences, and which, for additional, more fundamental reasons pervade his work.

Thus it is not adequate to view Carleton in a proto-modernist manner; a strong case could be made showing his work to be devoid of symbols, in Yeats's sense, and even to be a caution against them. His singularity may well be described in terms of his leaving no literary successors, and hence did not beget a tradition. He himself noted the distinctiveness of Castle Rackrent, declaring it 'inimitable',⁴ and wisely declining to imitate it. Only in a very tenuous sense can he be regarded as a novelist of 'landlordism'. And, of his literary apprenticeship with Caesar Otway, his first publisher and an ideologue of the New Reformation, it cannot be 'best to pass lightly over.'⁵

Nevertheless, the differences between Carleton and Edgeworth are numerous and noteworthy. She was a daughter of the Pig House, a member of the Established Church, an intellectual product of the Enlightenment; he was a small farmer's son, in early life an aspiring priest, an alumnus of the hedge-school. She had access to the salons of London and Paris, and met the best minds of her generation on an equal footing; he had to change his religion to secure a Dublin clerkship, believed Gil Blas to be fact, and alone of Irish writers of his day enjoyed a small and unremunerative reputation outside Ireland which he largely failed to cultivate. Maria Edgeworth had a reputation as an educational innovator; Carleton was a failed teacher. The difference in their social backgrounds is clear from Carleton's remark that, 'I had no access to the higher orders, and, except an occasional peep into a squire's house or an outside glance at a courtly gathering I knew little or nothing of their ways.'⁶ At the time Carleton's writing career began, 1828, Maria Edgeworth's career as an Irish novelist had terminated, and her correspondence doesn't indicate her reading Carleton, though she

records relishing the work of some of his lesser contemporaries.⁷

There seems to have been little contact between them, though the most notable is also the most fitting, and is explicit testimony of her belief that literature was a public activity, a belief which Carleton had found himself obliged to base his career upon. The occasion was her response to an appeal to support the idea of a pension from public funds for Carleton, an appeal couched not in literary terms, but in political (a piece by Carleton had appeared in the revolutionary 'Irish Tribune'), stressing

...the importance of detaching a writer of Carleton's powers, who can affect the middle classes so widely, from a connection which would necessitate the application of those powers to a dangerous purpose, and of rendering him, first, independent to follow the bent of his own inclinations, and secondly, inclined, from the generosity of his own nature and the liberality of Government, to employ his pen in the illustration of the social virtues and the cause of order.⁸

Edgeworth's support, which was possibly her last public act,⁹ indicates her approval of such an approach, and the incident underlines again the prevalence of ideological considerations in contemporary Irish cultural life. These Carleton was never able to transcend:

Before his career was run he had written for every shade of Irish opinion...a hack whose pen was for hire in Dublin's ugly literary wars.¹⁰

Carleton and Edgeworth are remote from each other, then, by virtue of background and career, a remoteness which is emphasised by differences in temperament and fictional practice. The lady who prepared sketches for her father and who regretted the somewhat narrow, 'Dutch' scope of her powers of portrayal is obviously different from the peasant whose 'plan was seldom sketched in advance; he would simply sit down and let his pen run over the paper as fast as it could.'¹¹ The tone and texture of Carleton's work is quite at

odds with that of Edgeworth, lacking her irony and almost legalistic tendency to exemplify and to project precedents. Carleton's canvas is a teeming, Breughellesque affair, more luridly colourful, in general, than principles of harmonious composition allow (his comparison of 'The Lough Derg Pilgrim', his first published piece, to 'a coloured photograph'¹² emphasises the oleographic component of his work more than it does the strictly photographic). It would not be surprising to hear of Carleton, who publicly praised Edgeworth for 'setting right the character of Ireland and her people, whilst exhibiting at the same time the manifestations of high genius'¹³ (a tribute so general as to be worthless), privately endorsing the judgement of a correspondent:

I have lately glanced again over her [Edgeworth's] Irish tales, and was surprised to find them so flat. They have little of the vitality of actual life in Ireland...Now, your tales show Irish life as it was and is, and I know not whether I most like their fun or their pathos.¹⁴

The vividness of Carleton's work does make him an artist of a different kind from Edgeworth. At the same time, by presenting Carleton solely as a laureate of the peasantry, critical opinion has largely missed the point about him and thus has overlooked the fact that his work, in its own way, deals with the same concerns as that of his predecessor's Irish novels. It is only quite recently that a change of emphasis regarding Carleton was proposed, and traditional accounts of him repudiated:

...Most Carleton criticism has been misdirected by an insistence on treating Carleton as an autobiographer or social historian or political polemicist rather than as a fiction writer with his own lively theories of fiction writing.¹⁵

It is important not to disregard the extra-fictional elements referred to here (in my view the 'theories' are deeply submerged and generally makeshift), because it underlines Carleton's undoubted

difficulty in providing a satisfactory fictional rendering of his material. In this very difficulty, however, we detect the basis of a link between Carleton and Edgeworth.

Traditionally, critical views of Carleton had hardly changed from those of a contemporary reviewer:

...he stands alone as the exhibiter of the inward and external, the constitutional and the accidental, the life, the feelings, the ways, the customs, and the language of the Irish peasant. ...Unless another master hand should soon appear, like his, or abler than his, it is in his pages, and in his alone, that future generations must look for the truest and fullest - though still far from complete - picture of those, who will ere long have passed away from that troubled land, from the records of history, and from the memory of men forever.¹⁶

In other words, it is as an historian or anthropologist that Carleton claims our attention, and as this article elsewhere objects to the unpalatable, prejudiced Carleton whose strident editorial voice is often as much to the fore as the genially arch tone of the documentarist, we might say that here we have the beginning of the prevailing view of Carleton which elevates 'trait' over 'story'. To be remembered as the historian of one's parish is, of course, by no means a negligible attainment, but as has been already said, it is not the whole story. Nevertheless it has become commonplace to play down his work because it contains both editorial and documentary material. In the words of his most illustrious contemporaries, Carleton is 'the historian of the peasantry rather than a dramatist';¹⁷ yet, 'His best work lies in parts and fragments; scenes of unmatched power and wit are buried in trumpery plot and harsh polemic.'¹⁸ It is precisely these fissures, this sense of doubleness, which is the hallmark of Carleton's significance; in fact, editorialising can be unexpectedly advantageous as well as objectionable:

Carleton...is a perfect example of the fate which frequently overtakes the artist as propagandist. He is perpetually pointing to some scene which he has powerfully drawn and announcing that it proves one proposition, while those who regard it are aware that it fully establishes another.¹⁹

Much as Carleton may have desired to characterise a particular line of argument, the fictional context is the final arbiter of the effectiveness and necessity for any such attempt. Thus, while by no means dismissing Carleton's ideological promiscuity, I have chosen to regard it as an arguably unorthodox but essentially expressive aspect of his fiction, rather than as an element superior or external to the fictional enterprise. Its disruptive presence in the fiction is expressive of what, in any case, is the fiction's theme, which may be summarised as the difficulty of attaining coherence. Sharing Edgeworth's preoccupation with life on the land, Carleton develops it to dwell, not on establishing preconditions for a desired life, but on the possibility of continuing or changing life under existing conditions. Carleton's work, thus, may be considered as a response to Edgeworth's conclusion that it was impossible to go on writing about Ireland, bemoaning the fact that 'No...point of union can be found, alas, in Ireland - no subject upon which sects and parties could coalesce for one hour, or join in rejoicing of feeling for their country!'²⁰ Carleton's theme - one might well say his obsession - is precisely with this lack of union, the vicissitudes of which are embodied in both his career and his work:

His creed presented no coherent, visible unity. It looked on his country and his people from a dozen different viewpoints and in a dozen different ways. It revealed only the perplexity in his own soul, the chaos around him in all the land.²¹

In proposing a relationship between Edgeworth and Carleton - a relationship which shows both the durability and complexity of our

theme, as well as re-emphasising the partial and irregular nature not only of its overall character but of each constituent of its general shape - one may say that Carleton's work presents the Edgeworthian ideal of life on the land under stress.

The nature of the stress can be denoted in one word: change. Edgeworth's projection of the conditions necessary to reconstitute an adequate, equable and honourable form of life on the land consisted of the creation of conditions which, implicitly, by virtue of the integrity of the values informing it would be resistant to further change. She envisaged a reversal of prevailing carelessness and disorder, and her disinclination to continue writing about Ireland after the publication of Ormond was couched in terms of her inability to derive a cohering standpoint from contemporary conditions. The hallmark of these conditions was the irruption of the peasantry into public awareness, through the economic slump following the Napoleonic wars and the agrarian and sectarian violence which intensified partly as a result, and more articulately, through the campaign for Catholic Emancipation led by Daniel O'Connell. During the teens of the nineteenth century, Carleton reached maturity, so that he both witnessed and, in terms of his own career, was eccentrically party to, the change in the times. The influence of this change, and his problematic response to it, will be examined below. Here I want to sketch the general impact of it on his work, with a view to making a case for his implicitly accepting the challenge offered not only by the transformation of his own life and its attendant confusion, but by Edgeworth's self-imposed silence.

Carleton's lurid palette and frequently hectoring tone undoubtedly denote urgency and energy, but also reveal an imagination

under pressure. The narrative substance of his work typically concerns a family, an integrated unit (inter-personal rivalry within families is a rarity in Carleton, unlike inter-family conflict), seeking peace only to be frustrated at every turn by outside influences. Not alone is the threat of dissolution ever-present to the family, but it seems an equally frightening reality to Carleton himself; his preoccupation with it has the frequent effect of engulfing the colourful, idiomatic exchanges of his characters with torrents of circumlocutory qualifications and adjustments. His representation of the peasantry shows them not only beset by socially derived menace or, at best, uncertainty, but also straightjacketed by an artistic manifestation of intemperateness and disequilibrium.

From the point of view of narrative substance (that is, leaving aside artistic method) menace is mainly characterised in terms of violence. As one recent commentator puts it, 'Violence in some form marks every work that Carleton produced. It shapes his thought and colours his imagery...Ireland is synonymous with violence in his earlier works.'²² This view is too general: more important, it is misleadingly schematic, since in all Carleton's work reaction to violence is more significant - more fictionally enabling, that is - than violence itself. Moreover, we find different kinds of violence in Carleton's fiction: the psychological variety is certainly not less destructive than the physical. Nevertheless, any reader of the two series of his Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry²³ must be struck by the consistency with which this, 'his best and most ambitious book',²⁴ features scenes of dislocation and jeopardy and portrays community values in terms of only problematically tenable defences against the forces of disorder.

The community does endure, generally speaking, in Carleton's work. In other words, the author does find a way of arguing against

his worst fears, and in fact some of the Traits and Stories deal with the question of enduring, usually conceived of in terms of the problematic career of a spirited young man. It is probably not the case that Carleton was consciously imitating Maria Edgeworth's approach in Ormond in creating characters such as Denis O'Shaughnessy and Jemmy M'Evoy. There was no need for him explicitly to follow literary precedent; his own career provided sufficiently tractable and colourful fictional material. It is noteworthy, however, that Carleton in what might be termed his most constructive stories - namely those which explore a character's presumption of individual identity - should not only adopt an approach comparable to Edgeworth's, in locating the exploration in the career of an inexperienced young man, but in addition should, no doubt just as unwittingly, conceive of the exploration in educational terms. The menace of violence may consist in its attendant psychological oppression quite as much as in its actual physical destructiveness. Psychological oppression, in Carleton's terms, means not only the overshadowing of an individual consciousness but also, and virtually as a corollary, the exposure of community values as being insufficient. Response to violence can take the form of renewed but pathetically blind faith in tried and trusted principles, however limited, or an increase in individual awareness which brings its own problems. Neither of these two responses come unmixed, like everything else in Carleton, and we shall see below how Carleton explores them from different standpoints. I shall examine Carleton's view of violence in different forms as presented in 'Wildgoose Lodge' [IV, 308-327], and 'Tubber Derg; or the Red Well' [IV, 1-70]. Alternatives to violence, presented in terms of augmented awareness, will be examined in 'Phelim O'Toole's

Courtship' [IV, 208-303], 'Denis O'Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth' [IV, 71-207] and 'The Poor Scholar' [III, 179-307]. Any approach to Carleton's work is bound to seem schematic because of the unevenness of his oeuvre and of each individual work within it. I have chosen to discuss these particular pieces because the tension between violence (conceived of as a generic term for various kinds of disruption and oppression) and learning (understood as experience leading to increased awareness) seems to me to denote the fulcrum of Carleton's work and career and to be the soundest basis for a description of his rendering of the relationship between identity and community from which life on the land derives.

It must not be thought that the first two works are, by virtue of their central concern, separable from the second. In all Carleton's work one finds a pronounced degree of overlapping themes and motifs. I thought it best to concentrate on the elements of his early Traits and Stories mentioned above because of their amenability to my theme, and also because in their novelty they allow us to grasp Carleton's uniqueness. My decision to dispense with an examination of Carleton's novels, written after the completion of the Traits and Stories, has been taken partly in conformity with existing critical opinion, and partly because they are, taken as a whole, a duplication of the themes and findings of his earlier work. It is generally agreed that Carleton's art began to deteriorate with the inception of his novel-writing phase. This dates from the publication of Fardorougha the Miser; or, The Convicts of Lisnamona (1837-8), itself an extended rendering of a 'trait', miserliness. Although the best of his novels - Valentine M'Clutchy, the Irish Agent (1845) and The Black Prophet (1847) - are striking productions, it has not seemed to me that they contain material which

seriously modifies the reading of his work which I shall draw from the texts already mentioned, even though they are forceful intensifications of the earlier works' concerns.

There is a final reason for concentrating on Carleton's Traits and Stories, namely the interest of this general title itself. It has been noted before now that

...the very title of Carleton's shorter pieces, Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry, reveals the double motive behind their writing, the two stools they are to fall between; are these indeed 'stories' or pieces of reportage? To be sure the interest of Carleton's material is so great, and his own temperament and situation are so arrestingly peculiar, that it would be a sort of pedantry to ask whether the value of these astonishing productions is anthropological or literary.²⁵

It will be noted that here again, in the very title of his most important work, is evidence of doubleness and tension. Carleton was influenced in equal measure by literary and anthropological concerns, though it is not the case, I believe, that the connection between them that he held in his mind was a very profound one: he is an original more because of his unique material than for what he did with it. The following verdict on his novels of the 1840s (when most of his novels were produced) could well be applied to the earlier works, even though the critic in question argues directly the reverse:

The novels of Carleton's middle years strain and buckle beneath the weight of meaning which he puts upon them. They seek to accommodate his sense of the turbulence and anarchy of peasant Ireland to the structure of the conventional 'thesis-novel.'²⁶

The final phrase here seems to me a contradiction in terms, since a roman à thèse arguably violates a fundamental principle of fiction, namely its essential non-conformity. However, this contradiction illuminates the problematical status of Carleton's fiction described above.

It is not clear if, by his collective title, Carleton meant to indicate that in his view some of the texts were to be regarded as pieces of anthropologically-based reportage and others stories in the more orthodox fictional sense. The evidence of the texts themselves, however, suggests that no such clear-cut categorisation occurred to him. On the contrary, what we see is the trait as the basis for the story. The story, therefore, is a ratification of the trait, a ratification tenable by virtue of its being subjected to the perspective-giving, cohering influence of the story. The early texts are both anthropological and literary in character. Rather than falling between stools, they were intended not to fall at all, though whether this intention was successfully realised is another matter, since for Carleton there remained a conflict between the facts of his experience and the requirement, imposed by his having entered a non-peasant realm (that of the writer), to offer a particular reading of those facts. The decisive change in Carleton's career, which may be associated with the no less decisive change which overtook the people from which he sprang (I mean the peasantry's claim on contemporary awareness), facilitated an accession to personal consciousness which proved amenable to distinctive - and distinctively problematic - but nonetheless enduring literary form. Much of the same sense, and indeed suspicion, of shifts of emphasis in personal destiny and organisation of the community for idealistic (or at least definitive) ends - work undertaken by agitators and members of secret societies - pervades Carleton's work. The sense of flux and uncertainty which his own career solicited, and to which he remained curiously faithful, consoled only by virulent bouts of self-pity, is given a partial objectification in the works we are about to examine (that is, it is not given an

artistically whole embodiment). Before proceeding to that examination, therefore, it will be as well to sketch how Carleton came to adapt the method of 'traits' and 'stories', and to attempt an account of why this method in particular (which is, of course, germane to his novels but not as signally expressive of his availing of the novel form) is expressive of the change which was both the determining factor and irreparable trauma of his career, while at the same time providing the basis for his artistic undertaking, receiving its most salient characterisations in the Traits and Stories as violence (arbitrary change leading potentially to nullification) and learning (regulated change leading potentially to separation).

(ii) William Carleton: The Intellectual Background

One of the numerous paradoxes of Carleton's bitterly paradoxical career is that had he remained content to simply chronicle the life and times of the Irish peasantry, he would have been a much better writer. But - to continue the paradoxical note - it is unlikely that he ever would have put pen to paper had it not been for his self-inflicted departure from the native heath, a withdrawal crystallised in his susceptibility to the stimulus provided by Dublin Protestant ideologues. This stimulus was not simply to chronicle, but to chronicle for a purpose.

Evidence for the genuineness of Carleton's talent seems to me to be more clearly contained in his unfinished autobiography than even in the most satisfactory of his fictional works. The fact that the autobiography breaks off before describing the years of the author's literary success may or may not be symptomatic of the unease he felt about ambition, an important motif in his fiction. Despite, or perhaps because of, the self-pityingly nostalgic tone of the autobiography, a vivid picture emerges of the life of a young

Irish peasant²⁷ in the early years of the nineteenth century: the very tone of the book is an expression of the dubious blessing of perspective, and of Carleton's difficulty in accepting it in good faith. Undoubtedly, from Dublin,

...he looked back across flat land to the valley where the grass was more green and the sunshine more golden than anywhere else in the wide world. He saw also a thousand valleys and a thousand hill-slopes, bare places on mountains, flat land along rivers, stony places by the sea. Everywhere he saw his people, eight millions of them on one small island.²⁸

But this backward look was accompanied by mixed feelings, the literary significance of which may be assessed by contrasting Carleton's intimate participation in the life of the people which constitutes the autobiography's main interest with his editorialised rendering of that same life which is the most consistent formal characteristic of the Traits and Stories.

Much has been made of Carleton's peasant background. Its influence on his intellectual development, however, is difficult to ascertain. By intellectual development I mean more than scholastic attainment. Dwelling on that particular aspect of his peasant experience, in fact, provides a basis for characterising his experience as a whole. Despite the impressive fact of Carleton's being a recipient of native culture from the lips of his parents, and of classical learning from various itinerant pedagogues, such that 'Ireland's three languages - English, Gaelic, and Latin - are the knotted veins and sinews of Carleton's prose'²⁹ - the oral character of the one and the patchy nature of the other give a sense of the formless, or imply that questions of form were not uppermost in the minds of the transmitters. This implication may be viewed from another angle, namely that the cultural - or more relevantly - the

literary artefacts with which the peasant Carleton became acquainted had no immediate relationship to structures outside themselves. Nor were they meant to. Education in that particular context seems to have been considered in primary terms of ingestion and mastery. And interestingly if it had to serve an ulterior purpose then, judging by the Traits and Stories, the native place had to be forsaken and an arduous pilgrimage to specifically enabling knowledge undertaken. The connection between learning and the perception of form (that is, the degree of organisational intention discernible in what is being learned), not to mention the implications of such a connection for the growth of individual consciousness, is clearly much too broad a subject to investigate here. At the same time, however, these concerns were seen to have a direct bearing on Maria Edgeworth's work (however reductive and psychologically naive her use of them ultimately proved to be). To my mind there could be no more conclusive indication of the cultural gulf between her and Carleton than the fact that such questions simply cannot be satisfactorily formulated in connection with the latter.

Carleton's pre-Dublin experience - and it is a mark of the sense of fissure which his work so comprehensively expresses that his career can be so readily compartmentalised - had little in the way of an intellectual dimension, though it had important intellectual implications. The story of his early years, at least in those decisive passages dealing with his native environment (decisive in that, when removed from that context, the autobiography conveys an air of his being lost, unanchored), consists of sequences of primary, sensory experiences - dancing, ditch-jumping, the spirited life of a 'brine-óg'. As Carleton himself says in the autobiography:

I derive more gratification from the limited fame which I enjoyed in consequence of my local celebrity for those youthful exploits than ever I did from that won by my successes in literature.³⁰

His career may be significantly described not in terms of its intellectual graces ('I myself at that time was not conscious of the possession of intellect'³¹) but as an education of the affections. The way in which this education prepared him for what, in view of the all absorbing character of native life, must be called the outside world, has been expressed by one critic in terms of Carleton's reaction to Gil Blas:

For the book borrowed from the packman had gone directly to the soul of William Carleton. The world was before him and the world was picaresque. He could be one of those lunatic, philosophical Irish wanderers.³²

It is not life which aspires to form, however, but literature. And if indeed we may presume that Carleton viewed 'the world' as a replica of literature - in my view a presumption owing much to rhetorical legerdemain on the part of the critic - that in itself underlines Carleton's indiscipline in the matter of form. From a biographical standpoint, something rather less fanciful and possibly more cruel occurred to the developing youth, namely that precisely because he found himself so well adapted to live the life of his community he believed his energies would stand him in good stead no matter where he went; he assumed that peasant life was the basis of life in general. Something of the difficulty in reconciling a sense of his own individuality to a sense of his being an embodiment of the spirit of his locale may be gained from the following comment in the autobiography:

I was one of themselves, [the peasantry] and mingled in all those sports and pastimes in which their characters are most clearly developed. ...That, however, is not so much in

itself, because many have had the same advantages, but not only a cultivated intellect, but strong imagination, and extraordinary powers of what I may term unconscious observation, existed in my case. I take no pride from these, because they were the gifts of God. ³³

In view of his earlier quote about intellect, the 'cultivation' may arguably be regarded as a post hoc qualification. But again it is not the inaccuracy as such which should be noted, rather it is Carleton's difficulty in maintaining a resolved position regarding who and what he is.

It is also vital to bear in mind his view that the peasantry are most themselves when engaging in intense and expressive performances. This emphasis suggests that identity, in his perception of it, did not primarily depend on social forms of organisation in the modern sense, and, as if to confirm this, Carleton's works are revealingly scathing about institutions in general, their agents, and 'those big words which make us so unhappy', notably nationalism. His approach, as he himself declared, was to depict the affections of his people, implicitly rejecting, or at least portraying in a severely critical light, superstructural presences in their lives.

His [the author's] desire is neither to distort his countrymen into demons, nor to enshrine them as suffering innocents and saints, but to exhibit them as they really are - warm-hearted, hot-headed, affectionate creatures - the very fittest materials in the world for either the poet or the agitator. ...The author, though sometimes forced to touch upon their vices, expose their errors, and laugh at their superstitions, loves also (and it has formed, as he may say, the pleasure of his pen) to call up their happier qualities, and to exhibit them as candid, affectionate, and faithful. ³⁴

Indeed, in an author who is a by-word for inconsistency, Carleton is notably consistent in his attitude to the clergy ('There is no doubt that Carleton never treated the priests fairly', ³⁵), to landlords' agents and to secret society organisers; this consistency of his, in

fact, accounts to a certain extent for the repetition of material from the Traits and Stories in his novels.

In Carleton's view, a view formed by his all-enveloping intimacy with the immediate life of his people (an intimacy so complete as to inhibit questions as to the ultimate end of life as embodied by it), the most significant of what I've called superstructural presences were the Church and the secret societies. (The practices of the latter are known as Ribbonism when espousing the Catholic cause; Orangeism when representing the Protestant.) The existence of such organisations must, obviously, crucially modify the picture of peasant society provided by Carleton's bias in favour of 'glad animal spirits.' But it's this very bias that makes a writer of him, while his persistent critique of peasant institutions and organisations is all the more notable in view of his close involvement with both Catholicism and Ribbonism.

A word of explanation about what I mean by 'superstructural presences' is in order, particularly as the phrase is apparently a contradiction in terms if applied to an organisation with a subterranean life, such as a secret society. In using it, I want to draw attention to a view which Carleton implies by repudiating his involvement with both these social structures, namely that they are contaminating impositions on what he regards as the true life of the peasantry, that life of activity for its own sake which neither aspires to specifically social form nor, by its nature, is socially articulate (it is Carleton's rendering of it which enables us to view it in formal terms, that is in terms which indicate its boundaries, and as such implies it to be a way of life among other ways). The Church and Ribbonism, by their codes and restrictions and principles, enable their adherents to arrive at a sense of themselves not merely

as peasants but additionally as believers in a particular design for living. Again, it is probably superfluous to the main concern of this thesis to investigate or speculate upon the nature of this belief. However, its existence is significant simply because it indicates that the peasantry had available to them views which presumed a degree of intentionality in experience which experiencing in itself, or experiencing for its own sake, did not necessarily contain. The involvement of both Church and Ribbonism with declared ends which one's life-experiences could be shaped to articulate, is in my view, antithetical to the spirit of the peasantry as Carleton appreciated it, and it is this antithesis that my term 'superstructure' is intended to denote.

The co-existence of two such organisations as Ribbonism and the Church may be taken as a sign of the peasant mind being divided. Perhaps the difficulty of thinking in terms of affiliation to one form - one mode of articulation - rather than another was not peculiar to Carleton alone. At any rate, Carleton himself suggests that dual affiliation was commonplace. We may assume that the locality had a majority Catholic population, yet 'the whole Catholic population, with the exception of the aged heads of families, was affiliated to Ribbonism.'³⁶ In all likelihood his membership was short-lived, perhaps lasting not very much longer than his abortive pilgrimage to Kerry to train as a priest. In any case the autobiography doesn't claim that being either a poor scholar or a Ribbonman has the effects of being in love, which is described in the following terms:

My existence became important. I had an interest in life - I was no longer a cipher. I had something to live for. I felt myself a portion of society and the world.³²

For all that this experience predates that of Ribbonism or aspiring seminarian, involvement in it speaks more truly of Carleton, I believe, than the later episodes.

Ribbonism and clericalism proved decisive experiences for Carleton, despite his rejection of them. His involvement with them provided the basis for the tension which exists in his work between violence and learning. The degree of his involvement in either case is, from the strict point of view of biographical fact, difficult to estimate. His aspiration to the priesthood was abruptly cut short by a bad dream. Clearly Ribbonism didn't provide very much intellectual fodder: in its 'ridiculous' initiation oath, 'there was a vageuness and want of object...which gave conclusive evidence that it must have proceeded from a very ignorant source.'³⁸ And in his fiction he derides Ribbonism on explicitly intellectual grounds, viewing it as a major source of the superstition in the vicious grip of which his people benightedly lay, and from which his metropolitan intellectual mentors were militantly (and Carleton himself somewhat more fitfully) devoted to rescuing them. Of course the Church too came to be regarded as a source of superstition, providing at least as much intellectual occlusion as membership of a secret society - and indeed it is not impossible that Carleton's father may have had a memory of belonging to the Church being quite comparable to allegiance to an underground organisation. However, Carleton's residual attachment to the Church is couched in terms which suggest the nature of its initial appeal: 'neither my heart nor my affections were ever estranged from the Catholic people, or even from their priesthood.'³⁹

Although the reading of Carleton's dual affiliation which follows must remain speculative until substantiated by textual evidence to be provided later, it seems to me at least arguable that

it provided him with a sense of there being an indissoluble connection between two antithetical frameworks of experience. If he rejected the tawdry intellectual underpinnings of Ribbonism, he retained as we shall see, an overwhelming sense of violence as an expression of the demonic, the obsessional, the arbitrary: this sense comes across so vividly in his work because he views violence as primarily an affliction of the violent. As we shall see, violence is much more obviously hostile to the affections than it is to specific social institutions. In the case of the Church, his rejection was again made on intellectual grounds. These will be more fully examined below; meanwhile it should be remembered that the Church represented virtually the sole, and certainly the most socially significant, intellectual outlet for a promising peasant youth. Carleton's dissociation from such a powerfully implanted promise of coherence may have been made on intellectual grounds. Judging by his work, however, he retained an enduring impression of the devout Catholic as a model of emotional integrity, refinement, unselfishness and purity of motive - in effect, of everything which, by definition, violence would attack and seek to annul. The connection is one which Carleton felt as well as intellectually perceived, the latter when provided with a perspective from which to do so. An outline of that perspective is what we must now attempt to provide. A view of the precisely intellectual content of Carleton's peasant background must remain partial and unsatisfactory. Even so, if specifically intellectual content is difficult to determine, Carleton's early years at least provided him with a map of the affections, to an accurate, stabilising account of which he devoted the rest of his life.

The first and in many ways the most important lesson in map-reading which Carleton received was, as has been mentioned above,

from the Reverend Caesar Otway. Besides being a militant divine, Otway was an ethnographer and travel-writer, avocations not incompatible with his proselytising enthusiasm. Verdicts on the documentary products of his pen vary; to my mind there is, despite obvious biases a more wholesome gusto about his work than there is in the chief Irish ethnographer of the time, Thomas Crofton Croker. The vogue for anthropological material on the Irish peasantry which substantially dates from the publication of Croftan Croker's Researches in the South of Ireland (1824) - particularly for material of a folkloric, whimsical or superstitious nature - acted directly, through Otway on Carleton. It may indeed be the case that the documentary imperative, coupled to Otway's ideological bias, blinded Carleton to the imaginative, or artistic, significance of what he was undertaking. The following summary of Otway's influence, though crude, is probably correct in broad outline, and emphasises the anthropological bias:

Otway suggested that stories founded on the suggestions of the Irish people would help 'the cause' if properly prepared, and knowing from Carleton's lips of his remarkably close acquaintance with the peasantry, advised him to treat exclusively of their habits and condition....⁴⁰

It is not entirely clear, in fact, if Carleton was responsible for editorial processing of the material; undoubtedly, however, Carleton himself found that he was making an important contribution to writing about Ireland, claiming for the Traits and Stories that 'they contain a greater number of facts than any other book ever published on Irish life.'⁴¹

A connection between 'superstitions' and 'habits' is not one which might automatically be made. The use of the two areas in close association reveals something about the spirit of anthro-

pological enquiry, a spirit which in the very act of preserving and characterising 'native traditions' made them susceptible to literary form, or at least to verbal representation, thereby raising (or lowering) them to a level of general accessibility. What the quote under examination reveals is the implicit interest of the field workers - the itinerant collectors of idiom and practice such as Otway and Crofton Croker - in the peasant mind. Superstitions were, it seems, assumed to grow out of 'habits and condition'; they were viewed as fascinatingly imaginative and colourful expressions of relating to the actual. But the quality of the relationships to the world which superstition implied was condemned for being non-material, unrealistic, fetishistic, and so on; it was written about in an invariably patronising manner, from which Carleton himself is not immune; its prevalence, indeed, was regarded as an affront to the realpolitik of the Union. And if we view superstition as a generic term for old Gaelic ways, there is no doubt that leaders of every ideological persuasion regarded it as the critical weakness of contemporary life. To the extirpation of that backwardness we owe such disparate phenomena as Daniel C'Connell's persistent use of English as the medium of his public addresses, the antiquarianism of Carleton's friend Samuel Ferguson, the New Reformation, and to a great extent the works of William Carleton.

As towards everything else at that period, attitudes towards superstition were double and opposite. Superstition was fascinating but had to be eradicated. Fascination, however, outlasted antidote, and however objectionable we may find the tone and intellectual crassness of early nineteenth century Irish ethnographers, their work conferred a sense of distinctness on the peasantry which was at least arguably a moral precondition for an alteration in their social status. At the same time, however, it may well be that the over-

whelming desire to relieve the peasantry of their distinctiveness inhibited the processes of alteration, particularly since the view of the peasantry had very little of that flexibility which would have made its socio-political implications negotiable; instead it was an intellectually rigid view, founded on considerations of principle, hegemony, and singularity as the hallmarks of integrity. The model for such intellectual organicists was the United Kingdom - or, more accurately, that fantasia of integration, the British Empire, and as a result, that which was the most firmly built-in guarantee of rectitude contained by the model was its most strenuously defended feature. In the case under consideration, that guarantee of rectitude was the Established Church, and given that, it is not surprising that an intellectual movement, modern in spirit and in its own eyes progressive (because inimical to superstition) should find expression in, among other offshoots, the New Reformation.

In terms of the evaluation of a specific Anglo-Irish culture which took place in the first half of the nineteenth century, the New Reformation had no lasting impact. This might be expected from an organisation whose divines - not so much Otway, but figures such as the Reverend Mortimer O'Sullivan - were continually on the defensive, and whose fiery rhetorical flights depended more on the characterisation of a supposed existing enemy than on any positive outlook. It is easy to be scathing about its practices:

When...the movement for Catholic Emancipation grew in strength, a new fear of Catholicism sprang up among Protestants, and a Protestant movement - the New Reformation it was called - was instituted. This was an attempt at the conversion of Papists on the grand scale carried on vigorously in the pulpit, the press, house-to-house visitations, and discussions in which Bible divines and Catholic priests took the platform and publicly wrangled over doctrinal questions - the usefulness of indiscriminate Bible reading, and so on - for the edification of

mixed audiences of all persuasions. Multitudes fell victim to this zeal for proselytising people of various degrees of piety and sincerity, including a host of old women of both sexes. The arguments used in public and private seem to have been designed to establish the moral and intellectual superiority of Protestantism over the superstitious idolatry of Romanism. The assumption of intellectual superiority on the part of addle-pated squires and pious evangelical lords, who knew nothing in particular of their own or any one else's religion is very entertaining...⁴²

The existence of the New Reformation, with its material resources and heavy intellectual artillery, made very little real difference to the politicisation of Catholics which was proceeding apace under the leadership of Daniel O'Connell. It is unlikely that the people understood in specific political terms what was happening to them, but at O'Connell's celebrated 'monster meetings' they had the perhaps unique experience of finding themselves more than a parish or even county-wide collectivity, of being viewed as a significant constituency. Even if these experiences were for the most part local and of brief duration, the fact that subsequent events showed them to have participated on their own terms in a success story must have worked wonders for their morale. And in particular the fact that the major success had a direct bearing on the Catholicism which their social superiors intended to debunk, made the sallies of the New Reformation - inevitably couched in progressive terms - seem irrelevant. The success in question, Catholic Emancipation, was achieved, ironically, in 1829, Carleton's first full year in the pay of Otway's Christian Examiner.

My sketch of the masses' response to O'Connell's promptings and its effect on them points again to the fact that, as Carleton knew and said, it was frame of mind which was the most important aspect of the peasant, since it was - naturally, so to speak - the least amenable to stabilisation. O'Connell reinforced

the social validity of Catholicism in the peasant mind, and coincidentally gave the Church a massive boost of institutional self-confidence. After O'Connell's parliamentary achievements there was no need for a Catholic to consider himself benighted. However, it was not the case that the peasantry were the recipients of a greater degree of social enfranchisement as the result of O'Connell's efforts. It would be difficult to state categorically what O'Connell's social and national policies were, and his leadership combined an extremely sharp sense of opportunism, in the contemporary political manner, with the panache and autocracy of an old-style clan chieftain. In other words, his appeal to the people may be supposed to have been a counterpart of the Church's appeal; that is, a cultivation of psychological, emotional, inward responses - responses which did not necessarily facilitate comprehension or intellection, which did not promote the developmental, cumulative processes of reasoning but rather the localised, temporary registration of feeling. Such an appeal was quite probably the reverse of O'Connell's intentions, but given the state of the people - their lack of education, their unfamiliarity with dependable secular institutions - it was inevitable.

This digression into the politics of early nineteenth century Ireland has been necessary to illustrate the enormous cultural difficulties of a career such as Carleton's. The battle for the minds of the people waged between the New Reformation and O'Connell's agitation, not to mention the contradictions and omissions which sustained each side's vision of its integrity, are enough to bemuse the detached commentator. Carleton, however, was not only a living witness to these cultural convolutions but a

participant in, and indeed a symptom of, them. The change from County Tyrone peasant to Dublin writer is an idiosyncratic version of the movement which brought the peasantry as a whole to public awareness, though not generally speaking to awareness of themselves as a vital organ in the body politic. The change from Catholic, whose faith was a matter of feeling, to Protestant, whose adherence was a matter of reason is representative of the cultural and indeed psychological duress under which both sides laboured - partly because of the joint insistence that there be two sides. But in Carleton's case the difficulties are compounded because he desired to apply the significance of having changed to conditions prior to change. At its simplest, he intended the perspective gained by removal to Dublin not to have any effect. His Traits and Stories are photographic, expository, explanatory, and seem continually tending to suppress appreciation of the dynamics of change, an acknowledgement of which, paradoxically, provides the pieces with their highly charged dramatic impetus. But it is precisely because Carleton, both in his life and work, is a tissue of contradictions that he is important. One obvious indication of his importance is whether, despite all the difficulties, Carleton has a vision of wholeness and coherence. My argument is that he does, though he is not necessarily in consistent command of it. My task now is to suggest its nature and its connection to life on the land viewed as a relationship between identity and community.

2 William Carleton: Violence and Learning

(i) Violence in the 'Traits and Stories': The Assault Upon Place

As remarked earlier, the gathering of some texts under the heading 'violence' and others under 'learning' should not be

be taken to imply the existence of two watertight compartments into which the texts selected for discussion, still less all of the Traits and Stories, may be fitted. At the same time it is not desirable or even possible to state categorically that there is a reliable interrelationship between violence and learning in Carleton's work. In fact, texts brought together here under one or other heading have important common aspects. Indeed, as we shall see below, learning might be classed as a type of psychological violence : to a certain extent this is true of 'Denis O'Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth'. And in 'The Poor Scholar', violence is both antithetical to learning as well as curiously complementary to it. In using 'violence' as a heading under which to discuss 'Wildgoose Lodge' and 'Tubber Derg', it is to be understood that violence means assault upon place, not in an immediate sense upon character. In other words violence means that which subverts the possibility of community. Again this approach to violence is not exemplified exclusively in the Traits and Stories by the texts I've selected, nor is violence in this sense absent from the texts to be considered under the head of 'learning'. Because Carleton himself became hamstrung by schematic approaches to his material, one must be very wary of approaching him in a similar frame of mind. A few words on why I've reduced violence to mean assault upon place will be appropriate.

It is a facile observation that the two titles selected refer to place. However, 'Wildgoose Lodge' and 'Tubber Derg' have little in common except a geographic colouration of sorts, and of course their focus on violence. Not only are the texts selected among the small handful of well-organised pieces in the Traits and Stories, but the idea of an assault upon place raises

in a vividly explicit manner questions about the possibility of a context for community. Such questions obviously indicate an intensification of Edgeworth's concerns, as well as having a clear bearing on one of my main lines of inquiry.

The description of violence as an assault upon place comes simply from the kind of crime which Carleton features in these two stories. In 'Wildgoose Lodge', the emphasis is on subversion and attack from the outside. Anti-community sentiment is located in an anti-social organisation. It features a strong leader, tepid or hopelessly compromised adherents, and its action takes place under cover. The threat provided by the terrorist is to material substance, and is conceived of in terms of an outlook so comprehensively imbued with destructiveness that its very singularity proves to be its weakest point. If its outcome is anything to go by the captain's conviction that violence is a tenable way of life is hopelessly misguided, a misconception the magnitude of which is to be most readily gauged by the tyrannical passion with which its adherent insists on its correctness. In this passion may be discerned Carleton's anxiety about the viability of place, since more so in his portrait of the captain than in those of other malefactors, we see a man who exists beyond the moral pale, whose activities and those of their supporters acknowledge no limitation, who take the fate of their fellow-men into their own hands (instead of sharing in it), who attempt to belittle those community values vested in the Church.

In contrast, and deliberately chosen for that reason (to give a sense of Carleton's complex approach as well as to argue that a single line of development, stabilising a definite point of view, is antithetical to Carleton's method), 'Tubber Derg' dwells

on the victim of violence. It is arguable whether the leading character in the story, Owen M'Carthy, is in fact a victim of violence. That is, the blight which afflicts him is not the result of rude irruptions perpetrated by black-hearted enemies. Tenuous as the case for revenge is in 'Wildgoose Lodge' it is introduced as a conceivable rationale for the captain's outrage. In 'Tubber Derg', the disruption which takes place, while obviously not as luridly fatal as that visited on the unfortunates in 'Wildgoose Lodge', is for all that less explicable, more menacing in being located in the nature of things. Nevertheless, violence in the specialised generic sense of disruption in which I intend it to be understood - a sense which I believe Carleton's depiction of the phenomenon substantiates, enabling us to speak of violence in a fictional sense - receives one of its more explicit expressions in 'Tubber Derg'. There may be reasons for the dissolution of the M'Carthy household, for their being uprooted from native hearth and home (an eventuality which for Carleton is the great trauma) - reasons, that is, which originate far beyond the life of the family and its immediate context. The case in point is the ending of the Napoleonic wars. But Carleton doesn't dwell on the broad view, though in other contexts he creates opportunities to investigate the origins of sectarian murder, absenteeism and various other social blights. In effect, however, these merely provide the background against which a more vital drama is played, the one for survival. And of course the fact that Carleton places a question mark against survival indicates not only the material facts of the peasantry's condition but Carleton's problematical attitude to it. The plight of the M'Carthy family in 'Tubber Derg' is therefore not so noteworthy for its causes. Whatever these are, there is little chance

of adequately dealing with them - in other words, of occupying that realm of the world from which they derive, much less of identifying with it. The significant point about 'Tubber Derg' is that, given contemporary conditions, deterioration seems the order of the day; it is the universal propensity which Carleton feels obliged to highlight. Although there may be comprehensible reasons for violence, there may as well not be, since whether with them or not, the disruption which disfigures the lives of all its victims emerges as irrational and inscrutable, part of the land's produce, as it were. The land, so to speak, violates itself, producing as a result of that abrupt, heedless, uncalculated change for which violence is another name, totems to finality and the irremediable - gibbeted corpses on the highway, fratricidal cabals, tombstones in memory of neglected children... The land, and more specifically the domicile (that which humanises, domesticates terrain, confers upon it the various values of property), is what violence defaces.

It is possible to create a tangle of niceties in attempting to discriminate, in the interest of the overall approach, between 'community', 'habitat', 'domicile', 'place', and various other related terms. I shall try to avoid this, obviously; but a certain amount of discrimination is necessary, simply because Carleton himself seems to have tried to differentiate. His attempt is not very consistent and is incomplete. Nevertheless, Carleton did consider setting important, and even if the details of his settings have a certain uniformity about them and feature the language of second-hand scene painting, few stories omit a depiction of setting, while defaults in presentation are revealing in themselves. As is the case in other matters concerning the character of Carleton's art, one begins by noting what his representations of setting are not.

They are not descriptions of a panoramic landscape, in which various conditions of men reside. And they are not interesting for their geographical definition. The phrase 'country of the mind' suggests itself, and may be used not to emphasise the imaginative element in these depictions - this, judging by the artistic resources employed to convey them, is rather thin. The phrase should perhaps suggest a kind of distillate of memory. Carleton places all the most expressive and evocative elements of landscapes he has experienced into each representation of setting. (For this reason he can claim a truth value for his various depictions,⁴³ as well as for other aspects of his work. The generalised claim to truth is, presumably, intended to be broad enough to include a claim to imaginative truth.) Geographical vagueness of setting may be related to the absence of a broad view of the terrain. The latter, exhibiting a lack of variety and an indifference to comprehensiveness, is an implicit acknowledgement that the diversity and individuality characteristic of society (and, in literature, depicted best in nineteenth century novels with urban settings: is 'society' by virtue of definition and experience, a metropolitan concept?) is not what Carleton wants to write about. In writing about a very selective area of rural life, he is obviously not writing about rural society. He is writing about part of rural society; hence geographical exactitude is beside the point, and may in any case be impossible. Carleton's sense of place, therefore, is arrived at through a principle of selection.

In view of his Dublin mentors, it is not surprising that a principle of selection operated in his choice of settings. Because he wrote about the Catholic peasantry, and particularly since he wrote as an Ulsterman - that is, with vivid experience of the land

being inhabited and worked by people who were not co-religionists, who possessed a quite different set of public sympathies and affiliations - he did not write with an overview, a view which denotes a social perspective. Indeed, Protestants are few and far between in the Traits and Stories, and if, as he says, 'There was then no law against and Orangeman, and no law for a Papist'⁴⁴ the fiction we are considering provides little account of this being the case. On the contrary, in the Traits and Stories Carleton declares himself to be looking back on a golden age - one which was economically fruitful, non-sectarian, and harmonious in all respects.⁴⁵ His summoning up of harmony finds expression, as we shall see, in his sense of place. A final point should be made, however, about Carleton's selectivity, a feature of his work which, as I've already said, was imposed upon him. But the imposition was at least in the initial, most productive stage, acceptable, a sign of arrival and of that intellectual dominance in which he had long believed ('I must confess that there lurked about me...a vague impression that I was not an ordinary man'⁴⁶). Yet it is to those rooted on the land that Carleton remained faithful. Apart from priests, whom he invariably caricatures, and interlopers (who like the priests are landless and, possibly as a result, have an uncertain relationship to those on the land), Carleton's characters are all of the genus peasant. He doesn't write about lawyers, doctors, soldiers or other characters whose social roles might abstract them from a relationship with the land. Rather, he emphasises his protagonists' relationship with his locale; the task of articulating his social relevance is denied the protagonist - the author assumes this to be his responsibility.

Essentially immune to social and geographical considerations, though not averse to partially helpful scrutiny under those two headings, Carleton's sense of place is most productively assessed as a keynote of his fiction. Place is both the character of the land prior to occupation and the influence that character imparts to the occupiers. Place may not be of geographical interest, but it is topographically significant; it has no inherent societal value, yet community values clearly receive nourishment from it. Place, therefore, may be considered as a term denoting Carleton's fictional rendering of land, a generic term covering the interrelated concerns of physical characteristics, amenability of habitation, quality of native life. A sense of place is to be understood as a realisation of the material possibility of life on the land. Strictly speaking, therefore, violence is not an assault upon place itself. Although the destruction or sequestration of property is clearly an important aspect of an assault, Carleton is more crucially preoccupied with the affront to the values deriving from place which violence causes. This affront represents an undermining of the relationship between land and people, a relationship which substantiates the continuing viability of both in their present state. A belief in such a relationship is to my mind close to the heart of William Carleton, man and writer, since it was a staple of his formative experiences (however inarticulately apprehended) and the core of his imaginative testament (however slipshod its intellectual formulation). In a word, then, place is Carleton's rhetorical assertion of quality and continuity, an assertion which is rendered in terms which he experienced more intimately, more urgently, namely coherence and integrity.

The most obvious expression of the values of place in the works being considered, though not by any means confined to them, is Carleton's representation of the family. In both, the family is the principle victim of the violence; indeed, the different sense of violence given in each of the pieces derives as much from the effect each different assault has on the families in question as from the content of the original motivation. The most obvious case in point is 'Tubber Derg', as we shall see. But even in 'Wildgoose Lodge', where the family can hardly be considered the author's obvious concern, the unhappily grand Guignol aspect of the action is provided by the dismemberment of the family.

...there were many persons in the house whose cry for life was strong as despair, and who clung to it with all the awakened powers of reason and instinct. The ear of man could hear nothing so strongly calculated to stifle the demon of cruelty and revenge within him as the long and wailing shrieks which rose beyond the elements in tones that were carried off rapidly upon the blast, until they died away in the darkness that lay behind the surrounding hills. [III, 323]

The completeness of the destruction is such that the land itself is momentarily transfigured. As a result of the fire,

The hills and country about us appeared with an alarming distinctness; but the most picturesque part of it was the effect or reflection of the blaze on the floods that spread over the surrounding plains. These, in fact, appeared to be one broad mass of liquid copper... [III, 326].

This is the incident's climax, and its colours, apart from their pictorial strength, symbolise the warring elements on which it is based. (In fact so intent was Carleton on presenting fire amidst water that he commits what seems to be a naturalistic gaffe: 'Unhappily, notwithstanding the wetness of the preceding weather, the materials of the house were extremely combustible' [III, 323].)

Before dwelling at length on Carleton's basic characterisation of the assault upon place - namely its effects on the family - some of our observations thereon may come more sharply into focus if we give a few sentences to the effect of violence on the other viable peasant institution, the Church. Carleton's attitude to the Church was an even more than usually complex one, as was suggested above, and this is reflected in the fact that he deals with it as both a defence and as such an integrated system of codes and aspirations, and a repository of superstition. Its existence is an expression of the people's spirituality as well as of their social backwardness. The priesthood (with, I believe, the single exception of Father O'Brien in 'The Poor Scholar') are parasitic and gluttonous even while being most attentive and responsible in carrying out their pastoral duties. But whatever the complexities of this attitude, Carleton basically accepted the Church as a point d'appui for certain peasant energies, and acknowledged its viability - if not exactly its desirability - as an institution. Some of Carleton's objections to the Church smack of his objections to external, unorganic impositions of whatever kind. As we shall see in the discussion of 'learning', the Church can subvert and mislead. The most relevant aspect of these observations for present purposes is that the Church can set itself above family norms. In other words, the family is, in Carleton's view, an absolutely fundamental model and source of coherence. The Church's status, it may be tentatively suggested, is assessable in topographical terms. That is, it makes no great impact on Carleton's presentation of place. Nevertheless, the fact that Carleton gives the Church a particular status in his scheme of things, and uses this status to focus some of his thinking on violence, enables us

to examine his thought with a view to being able to show later the significance of his concentration on the family as the critical target for violence. This use of his treatment of the Church to prepare for his treatment of the family is, in any case, consistent with the practice in the stories concerned of using the Church as a stage upon which parallels of the central preoccupation can be enacted.

The use of the Church as a physical emplacement (the existence of which is treated with double emphasis, in the familiar Carleton way: it is not only a physical arena, but one with peculiarly innate and influential associations) in order to clarify the ultimate concerns of a given story, is explicit in 'Wildgoose Lodge'. Ribbonism is the subject of 'Wildgoose Lodge', and if indeed it is 'one of the most powerful descriptions that ever came from any pen',⁴⁷ then that is due to its depiction of the enormity of Ribbon outrage. Carleton himself, relying on the fact that he was recapitulating an actual historical event, had doubts as to the fictional content of the finished product ('if tale it can be called',⁴⁸). However, the use of the Church as a staging post for the gang gives us a glimpse of the double nature of the piece, which subsequent events confirm.

The meeting of the gang in the Church is a device by which the narrator can attempt to objectify the captain by recording a little scene in which he refuses to drink whiskey in a sacred place. The captain doesn't have the narrator's sensibility, and thereby implicitly declares himself to be an agent of forces inimical to customary observances (the majority of the gang do as the narrator has done). Again, the captain is not beset by the tremor of disequilibrium which afflicts the narrator immediately

on receiving the summons to attend the meeting. The captain's characterisation as a doppelganger, interloper and subversive seems confirmed by the description of his social role:

He was a schoolmaster, who taught his daily school in that chapel, and acted also, on Sunday, in the capacity of clerk to the priest - an excellent and amiable old man, who knew little of h's illegal connections and atrocious conduct. (III,311)

In a sense, then, the captain by virtue of his place in the community and his undercover activities is an embodiment of community potential in a critical state of equilibrium. That state is presented in the text by the uneasy yet evidently inescapable involvement of the narrator with the captain. The balance is altered by the captain's initiative of assuming the priest's role, not only inverting its cohering, pastoral character but by his tone and manner replacing every vestige of the 'excellent and amiable.' Throughout the church sequence, also, there are black initiation rites and various parodies of sacramental rituals. Perhaps there is enough evidence to suggest that an idiosyncratically Carletonesque version of a black Mass is taking place - that there is an introit, a collect, and offertory, a priest's communion, and sacrifice must be at the back of everyone's mind. But Carleton is not interested in such a schematic detailing here, and it seems to me that the effects mentioned are merely by-blows of the way in which Carleton creates a spectral, oppressive, rather gothic atmosphere. Moreover, such a self-consciously literary rendering of the material as an identifiable black Mass might have made the church sequence an end in itself, whereas moving the action back into the domain of actualities tacitly confirms that this preamble, though it occupies the major part of the story, is a psychological rehearsal for the

unthinking horror they are about to commit. Whether he deliberately intended this reading or not, Carleton makes a subtle and telling point about his attitude to the Church, namely that while it is an important means of providing glosses on circumstances, of rehearsing attitudes, of collective coördination (the force of the captain's blasphemy derives from his inversion of the purpose of these orthodox practices), there is a more fundamental location of the real life of the community: the family.

It would be much too prescriptive to suggest as a general principle that, with Carleton, the role of the Church diminishes as the emphasis on the family becomes more central. Carleton's work is not amenable to such a programmatic approach. It does seem, however, that the texts under discussion exemplify such a principle, for in 'Tubber Derg', which is the one which deals most exclusively with the fate of the family, the Church as such has no part to play. This is because here Carleton is more interested in aftermath than in preconditions, in victims than in agents. Such an interest is presented by eschewing any idea of a cabal, the menace of outsiders, or the horrific outcomes which Carleton uses to reinforce his pedantically societal editorial standpoint. Here the emphasis is on the internal workings of life on the land, and this close focus on the M'Carthys' singular plight gives the story a greater coherence than is usual in the Traits and Stories. And because the author seems, by virtue of his sharper focus, more engaged with his material than is sometimes the case, he feels a noticeably less strong inclination to address as from a pulpit. Thus, by dwelling on the prime feature of the peasant community, the family, there is less need to provide institutional scenarios

in order to classify the family's value. (Nevertheless, Carleton does use the tactic of an institutional rite de passage, by permitting naive Owen M'Carthy to confront his landlord in Dublin. This is not a test of Owen's integrity, however, but of its social viability in the light of prevailing social attitudes.) The Church as a physical arena of expression may not be necessary to the development of 'Tubber Derg'. But it is an important provider of gestures of expression, and the M'Carthys make full use of them as indicators of their piety.

It does not seem to me, however, that Carleton is suggesting that the Church is a source of that particular brand of integrity expressed by their piety. Their piety should perhaps be read as pietas. Their religion becomes important to them when their more accustomed means of self-recognition are denied them, and though this is not to say that its importance is contrived, it is expressed in symbolic terms. The erection of the headstone to Ally - despite its crucial significance as an act of emotional recognition of that to which their relationship with the land has been reduced - is a conclusive testament to dispossession, a condition which very obviously depends on relationships with the world the material dimension of which is problematic. The Church clearly provides the M'Carthys with an emotional language, as it does to all Carleton's peasantry, and their use of it increases and becomes more necessary as their emotions become their only stock in trade. Carleton is quick to emphasise the relevance of his characters' inner qualities. Interestingly, the following interpolation occurs as Owen sets out to beg his bread, that is, as soon as dispossession has become a fact of life:

Life, when untainted by the crimes and artificial manners which destroy its purity, is a beautiful thing to contemplate among the virtuous poor; and where the current of affection runs deep and smooth, the slightest incident will agitate it. So was it with Owen M'Carthy and his wife. Simplicity, truth, and affection constituted their character. In them there was no complication of incongruous elements. The order of their virtues was not broken, nor the purity of their affections violated, by the anomalous blending together of opposing principles, such as are to be found in those who are involuntarily contaminated by the corruption of human society. [IV, 52]

The loss of land is thus not tantamount to a loss of integrity.

In 'Wildgoose Lodge', interference with the ways of the community is synonymous with the contamination of place, culminating in grotesque emotional as well as physical, violence. The M'Carthys, however, seem to have become ingrained with the values of their setting, Carleton's description of which should be quoted in full in order to fully appreciate his point about place:

On the south side of a sloping tract of light ground, lively, warm, and productive, stood a white, moderate-sized farm-house, which, in consequence of its conspicuous situation, was a prominent, and, we may add, a graceful, object in the landscape of which it formed a part. The spot whereon it stood was a swelling natural terrace, the soil of which was heavier and richer than that of the adjoining lands. On each side of the house stood a clump of old beeches, the only survivors of that species then remaining in the country. These beeches extended behind the house in a kind of angle, with opening enough at their termination to form a vista, through which its white walls glistened with beautiful effect in the calm splendour of a summer evening. Above the mound on which it stood rose two steep hills, overgrown with furze and fern, except on their tops, which were clothed with purple heath; they were also covered with patches of broom, and studded with grey rocks, which sometimes rose singly or in larger masses, pointed or rounded into curious and fantastic shapes. Exactly between these hills the sun went down during the month of June, and nothing could be in finer relief than the rocky and picturesque outlines of their sides, as, crowned with thorns and clumps of wild ash, they appeared to overhang the valley, whose

green foliage was gilded by the sunbeams, which lit up the scene into radiant beauty. The bottom of this natural chasm, which opened against the deep crimson of the evening sky, was nearly upon a level with the house, and completely so with the beeches that surrounded it. Brightly did the sinking sun fall upon their tops, whilst the neat white house below, in their quiet shadow, sent up its wreath of smoke among their branches, itself an emblem of contentment, industry and innocence. It was, in fact, a lovely situation... [IV, 1-2].

It is not clear from this how consistent Carleton intended his picture to be. Presumably shade was to be complementary to light, and the crimson and white may be an anticipation of the dual, though surely opposing, streams of Tubber Derg, the red well, itself. The careful itemising of detail suggests that Carleton's intention was basically compositional, in other words that the not obviously predictable interlinking of elements did by their very presence in creation, as it were, provide a complete picture, a term which the projective and insistent elements in the prose seems to declare to be synonymous with a picture of completeness.

The domicile, Carleton is quick to point out, is both a fitting adjunct to creation and, by virtue of its pre-eminence, a means of drawing our attention to the scene's attractive features. Its striking white exterior turns out to be a due measure of its inhabitants' moral pulchritude. The disposition of these elements - complementary and self-enclosing (what is the 'vista' of?), an archetype of creation - demands, in order to be appreciated to the full, a complement of residents. These (the McCarthys) shared the venerability of the beeches, the ruggedness of the hillside, the radiance of the sunlight, and the tenacity of the vegetation. However, if the topography is naturally provided with, and its

quality apprehensible by, what seems a gratuitous self-sufficiency, the question is, Can its inhabitants sustain an affront to their sense of livingness? The environment is capable of sustaining a detail such as the red well. This feature's mingling of purity and danger is, when considered as a simply picturesque naturalistic phenomenon, a containable item. In fact, a footstep is required to activate the redness. The danger element - that which is in the soil which may be read as a symbol of danger, or non-symbolically, as an unusual, intriguingly deviant characteristic of the land - is essentially latent, subterranean, and likely to be unwittingly activated. A threat of dispossession, which given the harmonious composition of the terrain and the native's reciprocation of that harmony, must be the most serious danger that the land can hold, is nevertheless as necessary a dimension of the nature of things as the unexpected red stream is. As in 'Wildgoose Lodge', the quality, and judging from the intensity with which Carleton addresses the question, the ontological tenability of life as he knew it was most critically perceptible in terms of that which threatened it. The threat - though given a specific character - is essentially inscrutable and anonymous. It has no rational origin. Its modes of expression are socially inarticulate, being either the stock in trade of the subversive or, less typically, as in 'Tubber Derg', the responsibility of the landlord - emotionally corrupt, 'vile and heartless' [IV, 15]: it should be noted that in 'Tubber Derg' Carleton subtly strengthens his charge against landlordism by referring to Owen's landlord as 'the fountain-head' [IV, 24], thereby alluding to both the well and young Ally's headstone. The threat, moreover, materialises itself in terms of an attack upon property.

Since property is basically a conceptual apprehension of land, and land itself a delimitation of place, Carleton - persuasively, because he is not exercising his newly-acquired ideological muscles, but is drawing on less artificial areas of awareness - focuses his problems on that which will animate place by embodying its definitiveness and integrity. Clearly the response to threat must be conceived of as that which will override it. For Carleton, such a strength is personified by the family.

A rather less articulate case of emotional integrity pervades 'Wildgoose Lodge'. For the most part, the captain betrays no emotion, relapsing into a demeanour which enables him to resist the pathetic emotional appeals of his victim for the life of his infant 'coolly and deliberately' [III, 324]. The piece concludes with a cameo of the captain's mother and 'her usual exclamation on looking at him was, "God be good to the soul of my poor martyr!"' [III, 327].

There are a number of revealing points emerging from this. One is the fact that the spectacle of Paddy Devaun's (the captain) fate is available to the community at large in the form of a grotesque, outsize dragon's tooth, the gibbeted corpse of the local boy. Community sentiment expresses itself in identical terms to that of the familial. And as in the case of the original outrage, Carleton uses horror as a justification of pedantry (in other words, it isn't only the intensified language of his descriptions of violence which are instrumental in delimiting a particular rhetorical force, but in addition such a delimitation anticipates and, evidently in Carleton's view, necessitates a socially moral conclusion). Thus, it is the community's echoing

of the bereaved mother's sentiment - the social aspect of which the misreading contained by 'martyr' is intended to illustrate - which is the final note on which the piece ends, enabling Carleton to strike an uncharacteristically composed attitude - referring to the collective expression (that of mother and neighbours) of sympathy as 'a gloomy fact that speaks volumes' (ibid).

It is possible to argue that 'the fact' in question contains an ambiguity which Carleton either decided not to exploit in the particular context of the piece or, because of the rationalising tendency of his determinately social outlook on the material, was not entirely aware of, creatively. The ambiguity calls into question the value of emotional response. We have seen that Paddy Devaun is a victim of his own practices by virtue, implicitly, of his violation of traditional codes of practice (in other words, acknowledged norms of expressing community value: the Church and the family). The upshot of his career is a blemishing transfiguration of the land, indicated by the nullification of possession in the firing of his enemy's household and the suspension of his own ghastly, talismanic remains 'within about a hundred yards of his own house' (ibid). (Reference to the quite covert land issue in 'Wildgoose Lodge' seems justified in view of Carleton's own intriguing, though passing, remark: 'I was so completely absorbed by the interest it excited, that I went to the very low elevation on which the house stood, and observed the scenery about it.'⁴⁹) If family feeling is an index of the quality of solidarity a community - a collective possession of place - should both evince and sustain, then Paddy Devaun excites this feeling and confirms its importance in a two-fold manner; first by eliciting

it as the ultimate moral appeal of his victims, and secondly by unwittingly clarifying it as the last resource of his people, a resource not indicative of comprehension, much less capable of sharing the assumed intellectual certainty of the authorial observer, but one merely of recognition and acceptance of the horror to which its own a-social, non-reasoning character is party.

To be transfixed by the intensity of one's own reactions, or by an awareness that one is inexorably caught up in living through that intensity, may well be a 'gloomy fact.' Typically, Carleton accepts and rejects its gloominess, inasmuch as he seeks to characterise it and regrets the fictional location which is the only appropriate context for his particular characterisation. Such ambivalence is more generally evident in his implicit condemnation of protagonists for their egotism, that drive to determine the fate of their place (that is, both their clear, unapologetic and quite vital grasp of their own individuality - expressed as leadership; and an indifference to the sense of integrity - invariably provided with a community base - which proved antithetical to theirs) is a defining attribute of both personality and role in the conception of characters such as Paddy Devaun.⁵⁰

In direct contrast is Owen M'Carthy, an embodiment of that meekness prerequisite to inheriting the earth. Judging by the lengths to which Carleton goes to show that meekness is a tenable ethic, from both the individual and communal standpoint, and judging also by the eagerness shown by the authorial voice to harmonise with the key in which the overall tone of the story is set ('I will not crave your pardon, gentle reader, for dwelling at such length upon a scene so dear to my heart as this, because I write not now so much for your gratification as my own' [IV, 3]), Owen

M'Carthy may well be considered a prototype of the Carleton hero. His strength, tenacity, fidelity and capacities of internalisation seem explicit confirmation of the critical generalisation that 'His religion was largely emotionalism'.⁵¹ They also amount to a rectification of the misplaced devotion noted at the conclusion of 'Wildgoose Lodge'. Yet, Owen's very strength is untypical. With his life in ruins, having lost land and child,

...his passions were not dark nor violent; he bore no revenge to those who neglected or injured him; and in this he differed from too many of his countrymen. No; his spirit was broken down with sorrow, and had not room for the fiercer and more destructive passions. [IV, 28].

But Carleton's point is not that Owen is 'broken down', rather that this condition evinces a reciprocal display of fatalistic composure, lending to its embodiment a presence as undeniable as that of the land itself. Even while noting Owen's exceptional frame of mind, his laureate feels obliged to add: 'His farm was not taken; for fearful threats were held out against those who might venture to occupy it' (ibid).

If Carleton offers Owen M'Carthy as one on whom ultimately 'the eye of God...rested', one possessed of 'wisdom' [IV, 70] which malefactors would do well to absorb, this is because his divorce from a sustaining material reality enables him to articulate all the more comprehensively the values which inform it, his relationship and his entitlement to it. In other words, for Carleton it is simply not sufficient for his characters to be abstractions.⁵² Value must obtain to material sufficiency, and no conception of sufficiency is necessary other than that of the land. Not only does use of the land provide Carleton with self-evident socio-historical authenticity, it is also a fitting basis

for the deeper reaches of his work - which in the case of Owen M'Carthy and various other victims is whether there is a natural mode of negotiating creation, whether the world is sufficient unto itself.

It is not enough, therefore that Owen M'Carthy is an excellent neighbour, a devoted spouse, a seemingly besotted father, and all in all a man 'whose heart was strongly, though unconsciously, alive to the influence of natural religion' [IV, 64-5]. The world, with whimsical hamfistedness, may challenge these strengths. But it is far more important to Carleton's purpose that the world should finally vindicate them. Because he does adhere to this purpose, Carleton's work adopts projective, pedantic, Edgeworthian features. The case of Owen M'Carthy, if its imaginative enactment is to bear out 'our object...to relate facts that occurred',⁵³ necessitates belief in the world's capacity to present a positive aspect, to seemingly collaborate with and redeem the victim of society, its creature. This belief, based as it is on the emotional quality of his protagonist, cannot be proved, analysed, or indeed justified. It can only be asserted. One effect of this is to dwell on the embodiment of emotional quality, Owen, to such an extent as to detach him from any manifestation of actuality other than that which can most comprehensively substantiate him - his own land. (An example of this detachment is the disappointing paucity of detail about Owen's trek to Dublin, one of Carleton's most socially emblematic pilgrimages.)

The transmission of emotional value is not confined exclusively to Owen. As a demonstration of Carleton's point that there is no value without a world to exemplify its cohering influence,

'Tubber Derg' shows the community at large (or at least, shows various members of the community in various capacities) assisting, as a function of their own emotional integrity, in restoring Owen to his rightful place - a way of describing which may be to call him their figurehead, totem of the affections. In 'Tubber Derg', the community is presented not as a choric effect, but as an extended family of the M'Carthys. In other words, despite the 'threats' referred to already, the neighbourly consideration which the unfortunate dispossessed are given is not only offered as more representative and more noteworthy of community feeling, but because of its disinterest, fellow-feeling and consistency clearly springs from the same spiritual source as Owen and family's probity: it is the indigenous crystal stream uncontaminated. It is the neighbours who ratify the most intense expression of dispossession, Ally M'Carthy's death, by raising a headstone to commemorate her. And of course, the neighbours are instrumental in seeing to it that Owen is restored to the land. The significance of the M'Carthys' restoration is reinforced because it terminates the family's mendicant phase, that acme of dispossession and, in Carleton's editorial view, a symptom of social turbulence.

The object of this section has been not so much to describe an overall pattern embryonically present in the stories selected, or to suggest that Carleton is interested in relationships between different stories. It has simply been to characterise, in the light of my theme, the peculiarly uneven and intense consideration of land and community to be found in Carleton's work. Yet, despite all the conceptual writhings and ideological posturings which the stories exemplify, Carleton retains a fundamental - and

perhaps one should say fundamentalist - belief in land and community. It seems necessary to describe Carleton's level of engagement with his material as 'belief', in order to suggest its character, intensity, emotion and, arguably, its irrationality. But since its power of persuasion relies entirely on Carleton's artistically naive acceptance of second-hand dramatic routines and received ideas, it is easy to dismiss it. Nevertheless, even despite 'Wildgoose Lodge', place is not simply a matter of principle. This is partly because of the nature of place itself - it is, so to speak, both a primary and ultimate representation of a reality which Carleton could only venerate and uphold. And given the overwhelming power of this claim, the individual has no alternative but to identify with it. The individual who has an alternative is either a perpetrator of violence or one of its victims. This might suggest that Carleton was suspicious of individuality, a very schizoid frame of mind in view of Carleton's own individual career. The fate of the individual is what we should now examine.

(ii) Learning in the 'Traits and Stories': Individuality under Stress

The manner in which Owen M'Carthy temporarily breaks faith with hearth and home is glossed by Carleton in the following way:

The Irish are an imaginative people - indeed, too much so for either their individual or national happiness; and it is this, and superstition, which also depends much upon imagination, that makes them so easily influenced by those extravagant dreams that are held out to them by persons who understand their character.

When Kathleen heard the plan on which Owen founded his expectations of assistance, her dark, melancholy eye flashed with a portion of its former fire, a transient vivacity let up her sickly features, and she turned a smile of hope and affection upon her children, then upon Owen. [IV, 17]

Carleton says in effect that Owen's plan to seek redress from the powers that be in Dublin is an emotional occasion. The immediate response to it contains nothing of reason, but is overflowing with emotion, and here emotion is synonymous with singular purity of heart, and inner worth, being an expression of unimpeachable (though sadly naive) good faith. Owen's scheme, therefore, is at once an aberration and a restorative. And emotion is also the basis for an imagined solution to a social difficulty.

As we know it places Owen in danger, but Carleton is content simply to offer a pale sketch of his protagonists hallucinatory experiences in the capital. The main emphasis, from both a dramatic and editorial standpoint, is on the effects his departure has on the family, and it is because of these effects - the conclusive loss of land, coupled with the loss of an innocent loved-one and dependant - that we infer that the trek may be regarded as a breaking of faith with the place-family nexus. From a structural standpoint, Carleton needs Owen's break, since it enables him to reach a still lower level of rural life, that occupied by the mendicants, as well as to bring about a more resounding rectification of the M'Carthy fortunes in the end of all.

It may be worth wondering why Carleton considered it necessary to offer the inference that Owen's resolve is an imaginative undertaking, and, having once decided, why the imagination should have contradictory repercussions. Taking the second point first, the contradictory effects seem to arise from a conflict between two different, and at least in this case implicitly irreconcilable, realms. The immediate effect of Owen's plan, it will be noted, is vivifying not only in a personal way but, additionally, in a manner expressive of family solidarity. Yet the

plan itself is a threat to this solidarity. Irrespective of the actual losses which follow his departure, and even allowing for the too heavy-handed emphasis on loss resulting from Ally's death, it is self-evident that any alteration in the family structure is going to produce a weakening of that structure. This much is obvious from the significance of the status Carleton has conferred on the M'Carthys as a family. The inner quality of the family members, which is the indispensable mark of significance, because it is an embodiment and humanisation of the natural religion revealed by place, is an undeniable emotional reality. Time and again throughout the Traits and Stories Carleton stresses the peasantry's possession of a volatile, colourful emotional life, and their reliance on it as a source of articulation. But emotional responses, not only in 'Tubber Derg' but throughout Carleton's work, articulate reactions to material possibilities and eventualities. That is, they reveal the peasantry coping with the vicissitudes of the material world, enduring them and, as it were, confining them to the material world with their asseverative, hortatory, invocatory and affectingly vital formulae.

In the present case, however, Owen has, in Carleton's view foolhardily, decided to rectify his material circumstances without reference to material facts, but simply by the strength of their innate appeal. And it is his naive faith in the likely success of such an approach which evinces his wife's emotional response, thereby confirming its basically emotional nature. The conflicting realms are those of the physical and the emotional, obviously, but what denotes a state of conflict is a separation of one realm from the other, in other words a violation of the self-evident truths of natural religion, which unite in a fruitful and

coherent manner person and place. This violation results from outside, inscrutable interference, and the separation it engenders is what Owen is determined to make good - by going to Dublin, he hopes, but when that fails by any way he can. One reason, therefore, why Carleton applies the term 'imaginative' to Owen's projection ('in hopes' (ibid)) is because Owen does assume that the terms of his appeal - which are grounded in considerations of the family, that embodiment of emotional integrity - are interchangeable with the principles of land management as practised by the nefarious agent and indolent landlord. No such flaw is allowed to appear in the metropolitan manner of looking at the world, as the landlord, referring to his agent, informs Owen, "I never interfere between him and my tenants" [IV, 22].

Carleton is critical of Owen on two counts - or rather, as Carleton presents Owen's situation, it is open to criticism on two counts. First of all his imaginative translation of his circumstances represents a natural but dangerous misreading. Owen took his own physical circumstances to be a deviation from the real. In view of the account of mendicants in 'Tubber Derg', the M'Carthy experience could be arguably considered a dreadful norm. At any rate, it is only through an exceptional concatenation of events, all with a direct bearing on the M'Carthys as an exceptional case, that the situation is rectified. Ultimately, any deviation in the story is the agent's work. Secondly, Owen confuses the emotional with the desirable. The strength of feeling aroused by the assault upon place is sufficient, he believes, to be instrumental in bringing about the necessary, desirable readjustment. Owen's projections represent a misapplication of imagination, yet one that is quite natural to him, so much so indeed that he compounds

his mistake by acting imaginatively. The blend of imagination and subjectivity evidently leads the M'Carthys to a nadir of fortune, from which they can only be rescued - or so the story's development suggests - by the world from which they have been divorced diligently and scrupulously applying itself to their salvation. In other words the justice of their case (or, to use Carleton's own term, its truth, which he strenuously protests) must be objectively ascertained - that is, without imaginative intervention, though it must be noted in such a way as to ultimately validate the constitutional integrity of Owen's imaginative associations, but not the natural assumption Owen makes that hope is a reliable prescription for successful action.

The preceding remarks have been included at the beginning of this section for a variety of reasons. One is simply to underline the overlapping of themes and preoccupations, in order to stress once more that any schematic approach to Carleton is merely an expository convenience, facilitating close contact with his work, not implying that any particular schema will be inherently less restrictive than those Carleton himself felt obliged to gird his sentiments with. As to the themes and preoccupations contained in the turning point of 'Tubber Derg', these I will argue are at the heart of Carleton's thinking about the constituents of individual identity contained in 'Phelim O'Toole's Courtship', 'The Poor Scholar', and 'Denis O'Shaughnessy', and that these stories are primarily concerned with such thoughts is to be correctly inferred from their titles. On the question of overlap, it should be noted that the trio of stories to be examined here might well be thought suitable for examination under the heading

of the previous section, while the stories that were used there could arguably have been used to support my point of view here. Observations made already about Carleton's implicit belief in the desirability of a moral wedding of person and place are sufficient to bear this out. My selection of texts for each section is not, however, as arbitrary as this note on overlap might suggest. To advert to our initial sense of the 'Traits and Stories' irregularity, it is very much a Carleton characteristic that his tales are thematically similar, but not in any sense congruent with one another. Nevertheless, the three tales to be discussed in this section emphasise different aspects of the theme they share with the preceding ones. In particular, the sense of the jeopardy of egotism (that Edgeworthian inheritance) which is an apparent corollary to the various aspects of violation,⁵⁴ has a much more prominent status and is given a more complex enactment. The devilish self-possession of a Paddy Devaun or an Anthony Meehan is not so conclusively a feature of the protagonists to be dealt with here.

A further reason for making an explicit link between the two sections is that my method here will be the same as the one used already. In other words, my argument is not intended to show that the texts chosen conform to a pattern, but that the treatment of the theme of one represents an intensification of the treatment previously noted, or that there is evidence to suppose anything more than that each text illuminates obliquely a certain area of its companion piece. Moreover, as in the cases of 'place' and 'violence' the term 'learning' will be used here generically, as a portmanteau term embracing both a general sense of experiencing the world and various local forms of experience. 'Bildung' is what I mean by 'learning', although Carleton has at the most a very tenuous association with bildungsromane, due to his poor formal sense.

I have opted for 'learning' as a suitable heading because my main discussion will be of stories which use learning in a pedagogical sense as their framework. It is also intended to draw attention to Carleton's pedantry, with which he favours us in order to illuminate his protagonists' learning experience, either by encouraging us to confirm the conclusions drawn from the sequence of events presented or by showing that the circumstances depicted add up to a much more cogent lesson, so to speak, than the protagonist is capable of embodying and which is the author's property. (Although it has been argued that, 'It is... confidence in his material which sets the early Carleton apart from other Irish writers',⁵⁵ this confidence is vitiated by the insecurity of the author who talks down to, denounces or otherwise belittles many of his protagonists, particularly those who are high-spirited.) Carleton's pedantry may be viewed as an obvious expression of the problematic of learning exemplified in ways as different as those embodied by Jemmy M'Evoy, the poor scholar, and Denis O'Shaughnessy.

Learning in a pedagogical as well as an academic sense is certainly one of the keystones of Carleton's imaginative world, just as it is one of the principle salients of his life story. Learning gives access to form; form enables a standpoint to be adopted regarding the world, and the idea of form makes worldly phenomena apprehensible by lending them the stability of formal definition: assimilation of such processes - encouraged by the histrionic performative character of the schoolroom - generates a sense of self, which, once accepted, facilitates a reintroduction to the world, possibly at a higher social level. Learning, thus, is a map of coherence, but one which is ostensibly a contradiction

of that provided by a-selfconscious, emotional fidelity to place. Whether or not it is a formal contradiction of the sense of coherence emerging from the first section will be discussed below.

Accompanying the sense of self-realisation implied by Carleton's idea of learning - or perhaps it would be more accurate to speak of the sense of a realisation of self-hood - are various other important distinguishing features. Foremost among these is the characteristic shared by all three stories to be discussed, namely that their protagonists initiate experience. Inasmuch as they are not victims, or their stories do not have their bases in victimology (as the preceding ones did), experience does not seem to be synonymous with menace from alien sources. In a pedagogical context, the learning experience is in fact an identification with and attempted absorption of the alien, whether it be 'as Virgil asserts in his *Bucolics*..and as Horatius, a book that I'm well acquainted with, says in another place', [IV, 74], or separation from one's family:

He was now alone, and for the first time felt keenly the strange object on which he was bent, together with all the difficulties connected with its attainment...But time would pass at home as well as abroad, he thought; and as there lay no impediment of peculiar difficulty in his way, he collected all his firmness and proceeded. (III, 204)

But, as implied by the remarks on form above, learning is a specialised manner of experiencing. For one thing, it makes experiencing deliberate. Yet if it is a specialised mode, it is certainly not divorced from or antipathetic to the general nature of experiencing. However, because it specialises in giving experience a point, even if the point is merely to be aware that one is intended, learning is a rationalisation and justification of a particular quality of attention being paid to the world and to oneself in it. Experience itself is not amenable to conceptual-

isation; it is simply the fact of one's presence in the world. A capacity for experience, or a desire to initiate experience, is a different thing from learning by one's experiences, as Harry Ormond found. Nevertheless, it is arguable that a capacity for experience shows a predisposition for that conceptualisation and intensification of experience called learning. According to this line of thought, however, experience is an undifferentiated amalgam of temperament, circumstances, age-group; it denotes a realm of primary existence which may sometimes have point, sometimes not; it is a continuum, though its continuity may be acknowledged by an awareness of leaps, repetitions and oscillations. If it harmonises with this realm, the unselfconscious, experiencing self (which must be unselfconscious if it is to harmonise) may be indulgent, selfish, be an embodiment of freedom without responsibility, and in general be as chaotic, plethoric and inventive as experience itself. This, to Carleton, is a lamentable state, possibly all the more so since it appears to be one through which he lived as a young man. In his critique of it, however, he not alone takes the opportunity to conclude on a bombastically pedantic note, but more importantly suggests that experience in the untutored, undifferentiated sense is not enough - there must be something like learning, though with typical ambivalence, Carleton can't regard learning as an unmixed blessing. The critique, I believe, is contained in 'Phelim O'Toole's Courtship', and it is with this in mind that its inclusion with the other two stories is justified; in other respects it may seem far removed from them.

Like many of Carleton's protagonists, Phelim O'Toole is an archetype; that is he is an illustration of certain decisive peasant characteristics. This much is clear from the story of his genesis and early life, of which Carleton provides a vivid account

which occupies roughly one third of the piece: the courtship itself - or at least the idea of marriage - is seen, through the eyes of Phelim's father, as in effect an antidote to, or constructive stabilisation of, his son's febrile career. The structure of the piece, therefore, theoretically suggests that of a moral tale of the-rake-makes-good variety. In the event, however, the courtship - 'the action of our story' [IV, 237] - crystallises Phelim's feckless amorality, and shows him to be beyond redemption. It would be too much to claim that Carleton, in this piece, is bidding a skittishly fond farewell to energies which are disabling in their vitality. Yet, there is a sense in which the final condemnation of Phelim is much too strong, and indeed out of character with the piece:

We cannot avoid mentioning a fact connected with Phelim which came to light while he remained in prison. By incessant trouble he was prevailed upon, or rather compelled, to attend the prison school, and on examining him touching his religious knowledge, it appeared that he was ignorant of the plainest truths of Christianity; that he knew not how or by whom the Christian religion had been promulgated, nor, indeed any other moral truth connected with revelation. [IV, 303]

Ideological obligations may not be the sole purpose for this awkward interpolation. If we recall Owen M'Carthy's spirituality we remember how significant a buttress against his press of problems it continually proved to be, allowing him to objectify and rationalise the vicissitudes of his station as the inscrutable workings of the deity. In a word, Owen M'Carthy is not consumed by his experiences, and trusts in the possession of a sense of the world deriving from something other than his life in it. Phelim, however, obtains all his vital strength from having no such cast of mind; having no system, so to speak.

One of the main repercussions of this is his complete deficiency in fidelity, a quality which his father hopes marriage

will confer, indicating thereby that marriage irresistibly produces a model of harmony and what might be called, bearing in mind thoughts arising from the previous section, 'placing'. (Of the five reasons for Philim's marriage considered by his father, three are connected with economics and the homestead.) The farcical, and painful, courtship adventures are the clearest manifestation of what might be termed career infidelity that Carleton could imagine, since they attack that idea of emotional integrity and its translation into material terms which confirm its tenability that Carleton bases his primary notion of value upon. The fact that emotional integrity is of such importance may be inferred from the fact that Carleton doesn't decide to develop Phelim's ideological promiscuity (he is both a Ribbonman and an O'Connellite).

But clearly Phelim is not an archetype because he represents an affront to Carleton's values. He is one to the extent to which he incorporates the life of his people. The ramshackle structure of this story may well be the result of Carleton's going to such exhaustive lengths to show Phelim as such an embodiment. His very existence, indeed, is the outcome of folk-ways, though this is not to overlook the childless O'Toole household's need for a child simply to provide it with some life. (Did Carleton, subconsciously perhaps, intend that the piece be regarded as a moralising fable, a parable, about the peasantry's having evolved a life which they cannot control? The somewhat arbitrary intervention of the squire as the direct agent of Phelim's removal from the community would seem to uphold such a reading.) But the personal needs of Larry and Sheelagh O'Toole have reached such a point of intensity as to be susceptible to the most sensational, most imaginative and least dependable aspects of peasant life, those

gathered under the head of superstition, whose agent, needless to say, is a wandering beggar.

It may be that Carleton is providing Phelim with an in-depth, psychological and spiritual genesis for satirical purposes. This is suggested by the arch tone and by such cheap puns as Mrs. O'Toole's prayer to be taken into 'the arms of Parodies' [IV, 211]. But this is not all he achieves. The location of the well is dramatically picturesque, the earth itself collaborating with the imaginative character of the O'Toole's undertaking. Carleton seems to choose his words carefully:

Let the reader, in order to understand the situation of the place we are describing, imagine to himself a stupendous cliff overhanging a green glen, into which tumbles a silver stream down a height of two or three hundred feet. At the bottom of this rock, a few yards from the basin formed by the cascade, in a sunless nook, was a well of cool, delicious water. This was the "holy well", out of which issued a slender stream that joined the rivulet formed by the cascade. [IV, 213]

Peaks and troughs, grandeur and humility, a locale appointed as a repository of spiritual nourishment - such elements are, I believe, intended non-satirically by Carleton. They are aspects of that serene, indomitable singularity, that unflinching, natural presentness that betoken for him the seriousness of the real. Satire comes from the spectacle of vivid humanity disporting itself in these environs, and Carleton chooses to present the crowd's general 'ignorance and absurdity' [IV, 216], and the rambunctious aftermath of religious observance, rather than the 'many instances of apparent piety, goodness of heart, and simplicity of character' (ibid).

Phelim's birth ensues more or less directly from his parents' making 'the station', but quite as obviously it transpires that as well as being a vindication of superstition, he also

represents the formlessness which typically characterises the observances attached to the station. Carleton differentiates between the observances (the station) and their larger celebrative social context ('the Pattern'). The distinction is not only of anthropological interest, but is allowed to point to a more exigent kind of tension:

We, for our parts, should be sorry to see the innocent pastimes of a people abolished; but surely customs which perpetuate scenes of profligacy and crime should not be suffered to stain the pure and holy character of religion. [IV, 218]

The vital and plethoric social mode continually threatens to occlude the quiescent and sublimatory religious one. Phelim, inasmuch as he is an embodiment of the former, is an affront to the latter.

This affront may be appreciated by contrasting the career in the community produced by 'the wayward energy of his disposition' [IV, 221] and his career within the family circle. The fact that there is a marked difference between the effects of his performance in the two arenas may be taken as a reference by Carleton to the desirability of family-place integration. But the desirability is present here at an implicit level throughout, Carleton having decided to dwell on the realistic obverse of the desirable, conflict. Phelim in attaining to the status of 'hero of the parish' [IV, 234], in his Ribbonism, even in his envy of one of his prospective fathers-in-law's way of life - Foodle Flattery led 'an idle, amusing, vagabond kind of existence, just such a one as he felt a relish for' [IV, 253] - does so at the cost of self-regulation, responsibility, and any satisfactory human relationship. It confirms a sense of his being an embodiment of reckless, headstrong, unsocialised energy that we see him so

thoroughly and unapologetically living by its grace alone. Moreover, and also as a confirmation of Phelim's being a community phenomenon, there is his repudiation of parental restraint: 'Before Phelim reached his tenth year he and his parents had commenced hostilities' [IV, 221]. But Carleton undoubtedly intends it as a criticism of the parents that Phelim always gains the upper hand on them. Their fate ultimately parallels his. Transportation for Phelim, and mendicancy for his parents: the harsh judgement of landlessness is visited alike on the rogue and his hapless, unthinking begetters. And lest the imaginative significance of landlessness be overlooked, remember that if Carleton informs us that 'the dramatis personae of our story are of the humblest class' [IV, 260], still the O'Tooles possessed 'a snug estate of half an acre' [IV, 208].

But what is it about Phelim that makes him so resistant to responsibility? Partly, it seems, it's his parents' fault. Finding that when they try to send him to school for 'moral and literary knowledge' [IV, 232] that he regards this 'as an unjustifiable encroachment upon his personal liberty' [IV, 231] they bribe him with a suit of clothes, with an appeal to superficial appearances. Manic superficiality may indeed be an apt phrase for Phelim's style, if it is understood to convey the total absence of inwardness, attention, fixity of purpose or stability. His career is a tissue of performances, pranks, lies; he is the very genius of his birthplace, Teernarogarth (i.e. Tír na rōgaire, Roguesland). The personal effect on Phelim of the latitude offered by indulgent parents and an inchoate society is vanity: 'the idea of being called to three females at the same time was one that tickled his vanity

very much' [IV, 279]. Even the clergy doubt if they would be able to shame him. Of course vanity is, in Carleton's view, as much a distortion as the lies, indiscipline and escapism that are an expression of it. In other words, it doesn't seem possible that Phelim, given the spirit which he embodies, should be capable of constructively expressing it.

Because Phelim's character deteriorates as it grows, meeting its crisis at the point when it might readily assume the responsibilities of adulthood (these being, in Carleton's view, fidelity to place and emotional good faith), it is not entirely appropriate to regard him as an archetype. There is certainly enough in his background, makeup and career to merit such a classification. But in being an archetype, he also turns out to be an exception. That is, he is obliged by Carleton's tendentiousness to violate his own strengths. In the event, this is managed cleverly and satisfactorily enough: the trickster is tricked. But such a conclusion is nugatory, from an artistic point of view, being in direct conflict with the picaresque tenor of what preceded it. Yet such a conflict, together with that between Phelim as an archetype and as an exception, is very much part of Carleton's moralising purpose - which, however objectionable on artistic grounds, does show him attempting to think through his material.

Given the state of the peasantry - in particular, given their frame of mind - it is inevitable that one of their offspring should be Phelim. Inasmuch as the story argues from a community point of view, Phelim is an archetype. But in view of the latitude allowed him and the absence of guiding structures it is inevitable

also that Phelim should develop 'some peculiarities of temper' [IV, 222]. Inasmuch as these irregularities are offensive to community values, typified however mistakenly by marriage, and inimical (conceivably as a result of such offensiveness) to a sense of personal integrity, Phelim is an exception. It is possible to phrase this view in two other helpful ways. Phelim is a thorough picaro, but the world he inhabits is not totally picaresque; and the picaro's career is finally judged by engineering a collision which he is congenitally incapable of surviving in his original character, a collision with the nineteenth century world of legalities and social institutions, a world in which Phelim's palaver is, uniquely, either useless or positively incriminating.

A second supplementary description of the story's conflict is to suggest that Phelim embodies the native genius to such a degree that he is incapable of seeing it objectively. Rather than identify himself with it, he identifies it with himself. Thus, using it to feed that sense of self which vanity distortingly denotes, he must have an objectively parasitic, subjectively exploitative, relationship with the place that bore him. The argument of the story runs, therefore, that a self engendered by relationships of that nature is a self susceptible to cancellation. Phelim's only reality is that of his volatility, and this by its nature is socially untenable.

The degree to which Phelim adheres to the cult of his own personality, the sense in which he believes and has been led to believe that the world exists for him to torment and disregard, in short his cherished notion of his singularity - these are the reasons for his eclipse as much as they are for his venturesomeness.

But these very features might well have been a recipe for enduring individuality, enduring by virtue of its resilience and invention. Instead, Phelim's vanity makes him a callow relation of other egotistic subversives, such as Devaun. Of course Phelim is not as coherent in his egotism as he, so does not have as widespread an effect. Being instrumental in the abolition of the home seems, however consistent (bearing in mind the household's status), crime enough. In Phelim's case, however, we again see Carleton refusing to consider egotism and individuality in a creative, enabling light. The story, while helping us to see Carleton's problematic approach to individuality, is more concerned with the idea of individuality instead of with its practice. If Phelim has claims to individuality they seem to be as accidental as the rest of his stock in trade. At least Carleton is reluctant to confirm them, choosing to depict those features of Phelim which might substantiate them as manifestations of rampant subjectivity. Instead, we have the idea of individuality under stress from Carleton's critique of it. For a sense of individuality itself under stress we must turn to those stories whose protagonists have individuality freely conferred upon them by their author - 'The Poor Scholar' and 'Denis O'Shaughnessy Going to Maynooth'.

The irrationalism of 'bouncing Phelim's' career may be explicitly contrasted with the character of Jemmy M'Evoy's progress in 'The Poor Scholar'. Whereas Phelim's ambitions were destabilising in their self-felicitating recklessness, Jemmy's have nothing of the overreacher about them. His initial outspoken declamation - "To the devil once an' for ever I pitch slavery" [III, 182] - is followed in almost the same breath by a resolve to become "a priest

and a gintleman!"' If Jemmy is about to forsake land, hearth and home it is for a higher purpose, not as a whim of his own wilful nature. Moreover, in desiring to rise above his station, he is hoping to redress the decline in family fortunes suffered at the hands of the absentee landlord's agent, evil Yellow Sam Carson. Because of its basis in a sense of socio-economic realities, 'The Poor Scholar' is automatically a more substantial piece than 'Phelim O'Toole's Courtship'.

Its substance does not, however, lie exactly in its rendering of socio-economic conditions in a realistic sense. Indeed it is part of Jemmy's plans to restore his family to a substantiatingly real sense of socio-economic significance, to remove the poverty, deprivation and wearisome immateriality of their presence.⁵⁶ (There seems to me a great deal of suppressed imaginative sympathy and power in Carleton's work, generally, concerning the condition of material nullity, deriving no doubt from his physical and emotional experiences - famine and internal exile: of life, and the earth itself, being in revolt and abasing itself. It is appropriate to mention this here since, although it is not the case that 'The Poor Scholar' is an entirely autobiographical work⁵⁷ it is undoubtedly one of Carleton's most personal stories.) Carleton seems determined to emphasise the importance to the story (though he was probably thinking of the general importance) of a comfortable, well-established Catholic yeomanry. The scene in which he is befriended on the road is almost the longest in the story, second only to the protracted 'wake' signalling Jemmy's departure to the South, and in its representation of the tender, the generous, and above all perhaps the materially sufficient, emphasising the

pathetic state of all the M'Evoys. As usual Carleton doesn't rest until his point has been made as explicitly and as frequently as possible, due perhaps to the aforementioned strength of sympathy - the unimpeachable prescription for survival embodied by those characters of his which he wants us to admire. The result is a distortion of his best effects, occasioning ludicrous scenes such as that in which Jemmy pleads for his life lest he die of over-eating. But, despite the heaviness of the hand, the point is a significant one, namely that comfort and plenty are values which those on the land are, in every sense, the poorer for being denied; and the reason they are values is because they signify the materialisation of that emotional good faith, or personal integrity, of those truly and productively participating in a life on the land. Lest this point escape us, Carleton runs the risk of an artistically crass penultimate scene, by having Jemmy as a clerical sprite appear out of nowhere to administer the last rites to his erstwhile benefactor. Again, however, the point must be made that Carleton cared little for what is or is not artistically fatuous so long as he got across his argument.⁵⁸

Beginning to complete 'The Poor Scholar' on a note of religio-emotional solidarity instead of allowing the story to come neatly to rest with the restoration of the family to socio-economic integrity makes excellent sense from Carleton's point of view. The scene by Lanigan's (the benefactor) bedside is a preamble to Jemmy's homecoming, a scene which is rightly the emotional climax of the story. Emotional emphasis highlights the inner life, that life over and above material reality, than which it is more enduring but to which it is not superfluous. Moreover these twin endings are counterparts to the two beginnings of the story: the

trauma of separation from loved ones, itself expressive of the family's material displacement, and the 'good omen' [III, 206] of receiving hospitality, all the more generously provided in the case of a poor scholar "bekase he's far from his own" [III, 204]. It is clear that the Lanigans' generosity represents a general disposition towards poor scholars, the force of which Jemmy articulates on finally reaching the South:

...having experienced as he proceeded a series of affectionate attentions, which had, at least, the effect of reconciling him to the measure he had taken, and impressing upon his heart a deeper confidence in the kindness and hospitality of his countrymen. [III, 223].

Yet, there is, almost by definition it seems, something formative and transitory about being a poor scholar which makes its status a strength and a weakness. And it is precisely the conception of a poor scholar as a problematic which Jemmy M'Evoy represents. Strength is exemplified by his being attributed with a consciousness of the pain of separation - 'no circumstance is relished that ever takes away a member from an Irish hearth' [III, 184] - and the resolve to endure it, to give himself to an alien world (the South as a foreign country, both morally and geographically, is a concept intimated by Corcoran, the kindly, brash pedagogue whom Jemmy meets at Lanigan's, and confirmed by experience), and to elicit the solidarity of his people. Weakness is denoted by the venture into the unknown: 'In proportion as he advanced into a strange land, his spirits became depressed, and his heart cleaved more and more to those he had left behind him' [III, 222], by the risk entailed by that change of station which would signify success, in the responsibility of being the family's saviour. (It is interesting to note the Edgeworthian features of 'The Poor Scholar':

the hankering after education, the obligatory rite de passage, the adjustments facilitated by older and wiser heads. But of course this story is more vital than anything in Edgeworth precisely because Carleton did not consciously adopt her, or anyone else's, method, achieving his effects by presenting a chain of striking effects.)

By adopting the role of poor scholar - a role from which his ultimate emergence into priesthood seems relatively incidental - Jemmy M'Evoy is embodying the hopes and the vicissitudes of his family. In turn, his family have been criminally denied the stake in reality which is naturally theirs. 'Naturally' is being used here in Carleton's idiosyncratic, psychologically technical sense, exemplified by Jemmy's statement to the landlord, upright Colonel B - : "We love the place, sir, for its own sake; it is the place of our fathers and our hearts are in it" [III, 266]. The fact of his deliverance into the priesthood seems less significant for its own sake than for the fact that 'the long-suppressed yearnings after his home and kindred came upon his spirit with a power that could not be restrained' [IV, 297]. As with Edgeworth, rectification and separation of projected natural relationships, a sense of becoming, are of more fictional and pedantic utility than life more freely lived, life more diverse in its choices and possibilities.

Jemmy, to the world at large, is not as important as a M'Evoy as he is as a poor scholar. The family problem is presented as being peculiar to them, giving the family as a unit a status of which Jemmy's taking to the road is the optimum expression. Both are subject to dislocation, and may only be redeemed by intensification of same. But as a poor scholar Jemmy bears the hopes of his native community, as shown by the generous collection made for his

journey at the chapel, that centre of communal association.

In a larger sense, the role is associated with the hopes of the peasantry at large, even of those as well-off as the Lanigans.

There is no country on earth in which either education, or the desire to procure it, is so much revered as in Ireland. Next to the claims of the priest and schoolmaster come those of the poor scholar for the respect of the people. It matters not how poor or how miserable he may be; so long as they see him struggling with poverty in the prosecution of a purpose so laudable, they will treat him with attention and kindness. [III, 204]

The assertion contained in the first sentence here is not terribly surprising, in view of the uniformly scurrilous attributes given by Carleton to schoolmasters, notably of course overreaching in all its objectionable forms.⁵⁹ Poor Jemmy falls foul of a merciless 'mercenary pedagogue' [III, 230]. The association of the fate of the M'Evoy family with Jemmy's educational ambitions perhaps underlines the idea of education as a special manner of inheriting the world, or of inhabiting it in a more coherent fashion. But in the course of the story such an association is extremely attenuated. In fact, the M'Evoys' fate is dealt with quite pragmatically, while it is the poor scholar who very soon finds himself in extremis.

Yet this apparent bifurcation of interest - apparent since both are reassociated by the same benevolent agency - may be fitting. The Church - or more particularly its officers, since the M'Evoy plight only touches on matters of faith from the point of view of Carleton's own subjective, projective, secularised pieties - deliver Jemmy from his cruel exile at the same time as it sets about rectifying its prime cause. The rectification is basically a matter of the landlord being provided with a series of well-couched

lectures on the M'Evoys as a typical example of what absenteeism can bring about (another Edgeworthian strategy, so much so that Father O'Brien seems a not too distant relation of conscience-keeping M'Leod of Ennui). It is the poor scholar aspect of the story which provides the true problematic, because it deals with the fate of Jemmy himself, and his fate is illustrative of the experience of helplessness which afflicts the people in their natural - that is, their socially bereft - state.

If, as has been argued by one critic, the two verbal styles - that of the populace, and that of Father O'Brien 'in their opposition, represent the two sides of William Carleton',⁶⁰ there is no doubt which side exercises him most seriously in 'The Poor Scholar'. The fervour and sincerity of Jemmy's emotional appeal to Colonel B - is noted with approval by his mentor, Father O'Brien, but it clearly is not enough in itself. Father O'Brien's own editorially-toned intervention implies as much, even leaving aside his subsequent advice to his young charge to "lay aside the vulgarisms of conversation peculiar to the common people" [III, 270]. Presence must be effected by more than impulsive, asseverative and essentially momentary reactions; or at least such reactions must be complemented by objective, initiative-taking, comprehensive critiques of policy. (The syntactical wholeness of the paragraphs in which the priest habitually speaks is to be contrasted with the ejaculatory, devious mode of the peasantry.) And this is the sole significant advance in learning which the poor scholar is seen to receive.

Prior to this lesson he has had the emotional integrity which is the basis of his hopes for improvement virtually stretched

to breaking point. Indeed neither Jemmy nor his author can properly comprehend it:

It was a situation which afterwards appeared to him dark and terrible. The pencil of the painter could not depict it, nor the pen of the poet describe it, except like a dim vision, which neither the heart nor the imagination are able to give to the world as a tale steeped in the sympathies excited by reality. [III,250]

He has been exiled, stricken with disease, has had his energies and hopes distorted and maligned. He loses, temporarily, the power of feeling - 'The conflict between his illness and his affections overcame him' [III,241] - and endures a variety of self-nullification. All that exists to sustain him is, he believes, 'the power and goodness of God' [III,243]. But the material assistance of the locals also deserves attention, and its contribution seems to be more in keeping with the material considerations which supply the story's dramatic framework.

The famine which Jemmy almost fails to survive, is a comprehensive symbol of the possibility of material nullification, the loss of a world, which poor scholarship, for Jemmy, seeks to prevent. Famine is the revolt of creation itself, a travesty and inversion of the natural processes which are all the peasantry have, and all they desire, to align themselves with. As such it is a parallel to the educational travesty which comprises Jemmy's classroom experiences. Although, then, Jemmy gains successful access to the priesthood, the purpose of his quest for learning has not been solely, or even primarily, to single out that specific achievement. Rather it has been to emphasise the jeopardy of learning, which even if negotiable simply delivers the individual into a less problematic role than that of the quester. Exemplary for his qualities of tenacity and hope, Jemmy is also an exemplar of community virtues,

and may be more significant if regarded in the latter sense. The individual initiative of setting forth to right family wrongs neither has nor requires more conclusive ratification than his blessed restoration to family and native place, the former a repository for an undescribable [III, 307] wealth of emotion, the latter a glowing representation of the simple, self-sufficing serenity of natural creation [III, 304-5].

For Jemmy, individuality seems irrelevant. It is simply subsumed into more significant categories of value, such as fidelity and endurance. Perhaps the trauma of choosing to leave home, despite a full consciousness of the necessity to do so, inhibited his capacity for further choice. At any rate, he seems incapable of asserting himself when beset by the injustices of the pedagogue. None of his experiences elicit an ability to think for himself or to exercise choice - two obvious attributes of the individual, morally speaking. When classroom vicissitudes throw him on to his own resources, we find that these are pitifully limited. And if famine may be metaphorically considered a disease of the land, Jemmy's bout of famine fever is a rendering of his solitary and pitiable self, a rendering from which education was supposed to release him. Pushed into a condition of singleness which may be a predisposition for individuality, Jemmy experiences that state's un-naturalness. It is appropriate that the stress of that experience - his life is, after all, in danger - is redressed not by education (that is, neither by the prevailing social character of pedagogy, which even prior to the famine is destructive, or by Jemmy's own analysis of the situation) but by fortuitous reversals of circumstances. The world compensates for what cannot be individually engendered. This formulation is a staple of Carleton's moral rhetoric,

and enables him to evade the question of individuality raised in 'The Poor Scholar' - or, if not deliberately to evade it, to offset its challenge by allowing his rhetoric to dispose of it. Jemmy M'Evoy in the role of self-accounting poor scholar is a transitory figure, wading through a slough between two roles - son and priest. His ultimate occupation of those two roles is what makes him noteworthy, according to Carleton. In other words, the conception of Jemmy as a community archetype makes redundant the possibility of his individuality, even though such a possibility comes into being as a specific function of the initial conception. Obedience to, or compulsory alignment with creation as one knows it, is evidently more necessary than selfhood as a critical aspect of that to which one is aligned. Individuality under stress results in a failed prototype of individuality.

'Denis O'Shaughnessy...' may be used to recapitulate the dissimilar but related career of Phelim O'Toole and the poor scholar, and to confirm our findings regarding them. In this story, education and learning have their ordinary associations, and these are dealt with by being placed in the context of an aspirant priest's career and by being enacted with something like the picaresque gusto of 'Phelim O'Toole's Courtship'.

Phelim's wilful nature is palliated here by being conceptualised - 'Ambition...is beyond all comparison, the most powerful principle of human conduct, and so Denny found it' [IV, 125] - and by being given a social character: 'The highest object of an Irish peasant's ambition is to see his son a priest' [IV, 72]. Denis incorporates much of Phelim's performative inclinations, but in his case these are all concentrated in the

self-generated myth of his intellectual superiority. Phelim is too unbalanced to advance a myth of himself, or indeed to adhere to a fixed ambition. Like Phelim also, Denis considers economic reality as simply an arrangement conducive to the furthering of his career. The protracted business about Denis's father's horse and the parish priest, Denis's putative mentor, is relevant only insofar as it confirms the general skittishness of Denis's pretensions, evinced elsewhere by such statements as "This world is a mere bird of passage, Miss Norah" [IV, 97] and, "I was soliloquising in the glen below...meditating upon the transparency of all human events" [IV, 126]. Sentiments like these are used by Carleton for satirical purposes, to guy the distance Denis sets between himself and the world. The perspective provided by them is cock-eyed. But this is because the world (with one vital exception) obliges him by keeping its distance, conferring on him the rewards of a status he has assumed instead of earned. However, lest we lose sight of the comic side of the material, Carleton continually takes the harm out of Denis's excesses (again with the same crucial exception, Susan Connor, whose role will be discussed later). Thus, while Phelim O'Toole's rift with his parents is a sign of incipient irresponsibility, Denis's change of name and demand for different treatment, though difficult to accept, can be ultimately regarded as a function of his learning. "Well, well, this knowledges bates the world!" [IV, 104] Denis's father admiringly exclaims; this is what his son literally believes. And even if 'it is not real but affected knowledge we are writing about' [IV, 90], the affectation is real enough.

Denis, however, is not in search of knowledge or of any exceptional improvement. It is very much part of the story's point that Denis's learning, in the very subjective mode in which he

possesses it, is a mere patina:

The basis, however, of his character was shrewd humour and good sense; and, even at the stage of life which we have just described, it might have been evident to a close observer that when a proper knowledge of his powers, joined to a further acquaintance with the world, would enable him to cast off the boyish assumption of pedantry, a man of a keen, ready intellect and considerable penetration would remain. [IV, 113-4]

As we shall see, however, it is not the maturation from boy to man which concerns Carleton, but the replacement of an engaging, though fabricated, persona with something more genuine. The fact that 'going' in the title refers not to Denis's journey between home and Maynooth, but his being for the predominant, and most relevant, part of the story on the point of leaving has a significance beyond the geographical.

If like Phelim O'Toole, Denis is a victim of pride, like Jemmy M'Evoy he is a repository of family affection: he 'was nowhere so great a man as in his own chimney-corner, surrounded by his family' [IV, 114], (occupying, incidentally, the traditional story-teller's position). He may not be a pilgrim - or at least Carleton implies that his pilgrimage is not serious because it is self-inflicted - but he is, unwittingly, a seeker after value. In Jemmy M'Evoy's case the particular search was a detailed, personal affair, being capable of generalisation only by being viewed as providing the infrastructure to assist in the comprehension of a social archetype, the poor scholar. Jemmy's tenacity represents his commitment to a particular course of action, a particular mode of experiencing. With Denis, however, the requirement is that he relate to the world in a particularised, attentive manner. He is not criticised for his pride and pedantry alone, though these aspects are eminently assailable, especially since by being linked, they represent a

critique of learning. Denis, in fact, is Carleton's most complete embodiment of his misgivings about education. Our hero's glib facility with classical tags and rhetorical bluster is a telling parody of the manner in which that which has been learned can impose artificial patterns of response, can distort mundane exchanges, and alter the presentation of self in everyday life. Consumed by the extent of his knowledge, Denis compulsively reproduces and demands respect for the amount of control these artificial modes have over him. As 'going' suggests, he is only partially in his world, and this is seen as an unrealistic and untenable position.

In addition, however, despite being detached from his people by the virulent combination of pride and pedantry, Denis's case, while admittedly and attractively idiosyncratic, is also representative:

The Irish people, I need scarcely observe, are a poor people; they are also, very probably for the same reason, an imaginative people - at all events, they are excited by occurrences which would not produce the same vivacity of emotion which they experience upon any other people in the world...In Ireland a very simple accession to their hopes or comforts produces an extraordinary elevation of mind, and so completely unlocks the sluices of their feelings that every consideration is lost in the elation of the moment. [IV, 115-6]

Denis's learning allows him, by virtue of the passion with which he parades it, to give a certain temporary form to the release of feeling which accompanies hope. Just as, in Carleton's view, ambition represents a structuring of hopes, a realisation that hopes may be a legitimate prompt to attainment, so the undifferentiated feelings accompanying hope are sublimated into pride. Both aspects of this view imply that structure depersonalises. Moreover, and evidently as a corollary to the observations just quoted, Denis's choice of the priesthood is presented as an imaginative outlet,

but for that very reason a source of the inflated, unrealistic frame of mind denoted by ambition 'with its train of shadowy honours' [IV, 126]: reservations about the priesthood caused by keeping the company of local office-holders are dispelled, because while 'the long and sanctified calendar of saints and miracles opened upon him, there still remained enough to throw a dim and solemn charm of shadowy pomp around the visions of a mind naturally imaginative' [IV, 179]. Yet Denis does not in the end enter the priesthood. It is time now to look at what saves him from himself.

The main difference between the story of Denis O'Shaughnessy and its companion pieces in this section is his saviour, someone who prevents the completion of the process of separation ('going') to which Denis has presumptuously committed himself. The saviour is Susan Connor, possessor of a look 'that staggered for the moment every ecclesiastical resolution within him' [IV, 120]. It is important for the story that Denis does not realise himself with the aid of a mentor, and that it is a member of the opposite sex who is instrumental in bringing him down to earth. These two points are related, since the absence of a mentor confirms the earlier remark about Denis's ability to grow out of his affectations, while Susan's existence creates a sense of natural emotion, antithetical to the fabricated variety aroused by notions of the priesthood:

Denis felt the influence of her emotions; he remained silent for a short time, during which, however, ambition drew in the background all those dimly splendid visions that associate themselves with the sacerdotal functions in a country where the people place no bounds to the spiritual power of their pastors. [IV, 122]

Moreover, Susan introduces a note of uncertainty, the value of which is undisputed:

Nothing humbles the mind and gives the natural feelings their full play so well as a struggle in life or the appearance of its approach. [IV, 130]

To leave for Maynooth would be to leave Susan.

Nevertheless, Susan too is a member of the peasantry and of the Church, so that the uncertainty she creates in Denis has its effect also on herself. The vow is a rationalisation of the disorder which Denis's going is bound to bring about in her life, since his departure will be the confirmation of his rejection of her. Such a rejection is an amputation of the life - that is, the simple, vital and attractive virtues - of the community: this sense has been generally provided for by the chorus of local beauties declaring what a shame it is that Denis must be denied them. The consequences of Denis's ambition are reproduced in Susan's vow which, for all the strength of their subjective reactions to it, strikes the reader as a more bizarrely imaginative straightjacket than Denis's yearning after the powers of priestcraft, a much more complete self-denial. Susan's vow also implicitly demonstrates the dangers of being able to alter one's relationship with the world, and is a covert criticism of the Church for providing the psychological instruments to do so. This point also gains more substance when applied to Denis's justification of his ambition to Susan:

I believe that if a priest did his duty, he might possibly possess miraculous power. There is great pomp and splendour in her ceremonies, a sense of high and boundless authority in her pastors; there is rank in her orders sufficient even for ambition. Then the deference, the awe, and the humility with which they are approached by the people... [IV, 189].

Although Denis's sense of the Church is not entirely confined to this description, its emphasis on his own subjective requirements of

the Church provides the story with its central perspective. Regardless of what else the Church might be, it is for Denis a means of transplantation and self-transformation.

As such it is a means of breaking faith with the people, a point conveyed in the marvellous scene where the neighbourhood equip the departing Denis with the fruits of the country - insigniae so to speak, of his original peasant identity. The community, regardless of Denis's own sense of himself, see him as their offering to the world at large, not knowing the virtual impossibility of retaining such a sense of himself. Yet Denis is sensible of what departure means. He,

...who was never deficient in warmth of feeling, could not be insensible to the love and pride with which his family had always looked upon him. Ambition, as he approached it, lost much of its fictitious glitter. A sense of sorrow, if not of remorse for the fastidious and over-bearing spirit he had manifested to them, pressed upon his heart. Pride, in fact, was expelled; Nature resumed her empire over him; he looked upon the last two months of his life as a man would be apt to do who had been all that time under the dominion of a feverish dream. [IV, 182]

And the consolidation of the ousting of Pride is seen as, book in hand (closed, one assumes), he dwells upon his native place, finding that 'every object associated itself with delightful emotion that kindled new life in a spirit from which their parent affections had not yet passed away' [IV, 184]. As a natural entailment of Denis's evident rediscovery of his true domain, he declares himself to Susan: 'Our hero now forgot his learning; his polysyllables were laid aside, and his pedantry utterly abandoned' [IV, 186]. Susan's oath assumes crucial importance because it attempts to, and in fact temporarily succeeds in, cancelling Denis's realisation of a world of true values.

The truth contained in Denis's realisation receives various expressions connected with the values of real feeling, its relation to land and family, the sanctity of place, and the like. It is also contained in an important admission of his to Susan: "I never will forgive myself for acting a double part to you and to the world" [IV, 187]. Doubleness - which all of Carleton's work exemplifies in the act of resisting - consists in Denis's case of assuming, or fabricating, or living out an imaginary persona, a practice which effectively negates his real self. The negation occurs because the false self relies for its negotiability on a separation from the community; in other words, Denis wills his misperceptions. That he does so consistently up to a certain point may make him 'a naive humbug'.⁶¹ But this is not the whole story. The very fact of his behaving, however parodically, according to the promptings of will and choice entitles him to be thought of as an individual. Yet it is this very conception of Denis which Carleton undercuts, makes untenable and finally disabuses his hero of. The decision to impersonate a point of departure is deeply subversive and self-betraying. Nothing could express this more clearly than the ending of the story which on the one hand brusquely overrides the difficulty caused by the vow as well as Denis's life at Maynooth, while on the other confirming their full installation in the life of the community. The expeditious treatment of the one contrasts strongly with the deft little vignette indicating that Denis and Susan are blessedly lost to the world at large, information conveyed by Denis's favourite former butt.

This ending, in its attempted objectification of the protagonist's fate (and the implicit moral accompanying it), may be

compared to the endings of the other two stories in this section. In all three cases we observe from a distance that the protagonist has attained an appropriate level, one which illustrates his capacity to relate to his experiences. Phelim O'Toole's obvious deficiency in this department, a result of the sheer compulsive energy (or perhaps anxiety) to experience in a primitive, undifferentiated sense may be illuminatingly contrasted with the manner in which both Jemmy M'Evoy and Denis O'Shaughnessy are ultimately capable of discriminating between vital and detrimental life-values. But while both these protagonists gain access to a sense of values, the realisation of this sense is not possible on an individual level. Jemmy and Denis are made to undergo two very distinct versions of separation. Each of these is the basis for an increase in personal awareness. Yet such an enlargement of consciousness, together with its important moral and social implications, is only significant by being dispensable. More important than the individual is the land that bred him; more enduring than personal consciousness is the communal frame of being. Yet these larger categories declare themselves when confronted with an over-reaching individual - one whose mind, whose experiencing faculty, must be regulated to their norms. Learning in the obvious scholastic sense is simply a version of learning in the bildung sense. But in whatever sense we take it, learning is both a release and a test of the individual, a route of deliverance and limitation; it provides his provenance and his jeopardy.

3 William Carleton and Tradition

When he called Carleton 'the demiurge of a new tradition', Yeats must have had in mind the peculiarly intimate access works like the Traits and Stories provide to the mind of the native, as well as the vivid fragments in which the life of the people is most convincingly rendered. Certainly it is appropriate to view Carleton as the inventor of the 'fiery shorthand'⁶² in which according to Yeats, a lot of nineteenth century Irish fiction was written. But if Yeats is arguing that there were heirs and successors to the demiurge and his tradition, they are more obviously folklorists. Interesting though their material is, and though their shorthand is more accomplished than Carleton's, the fire only glows remotely in their work. A case could well be made for Carleton as a unique, singular and eccentric figure in Irish literature - eccentric that is to the more established criteria which the existence of a tradition would substantiate.

This view of Carleton is also inadequate. Singular he certainly is, to the extent that his career shows him meeting head-on the unresolvable problematic of his unique venture to Dublin. The shocks of such a collision are so great that while he exposes his protagonists to the possibility of experiencing them, he is usually at pains to rationalise them away or elevate his characters above them. Thus they attain an idealised, negotiable singularity, quite distinct from and in a sense an antidote to, his own condition. At least this describes Carleton's practice in the stories with an individual bias. Elsewhere - arbitrarily regarding the Traits and Stories for the moment as containing stories with an 'individual' bias and those with a 'location' bias - the tactic is merely to describe and moralise, to deny the deliverance of

rationalisation. In such a denial, however, lies the cancellation of the world.

For all his picaresque, and picturesque, representation of peasant life, and notwithstanding the consistency with which critics have acclaimed it, Carleton is noteworthy for more. He is noteworthy for the most prominent limitation of his work, what I've been calling editorialising. This feature, however irritating or however much a solecism, is the most obvious indication of the additional contribution made by Carleton's work, and which indeed makes it so explicitly contemporary - namely the overwhelming desire it contains for the world to make sense. Although couched in the inherited terms of policy-makers and ideologues, narrow and intense and reductionist (the objective of their rhetoric to bring about a negotiable singularity - a united country, a Christian people, a Loyalist disposition), Carleton's yearning for coherence is autobiographical in source and subjective-projective in character. If, as he claims in 'The Poor Scholar', 'Of all the characters of all the people of all nations on this habitable globe, I verily believe that that of the Irish is the most profound and unfathomable, and the most difficult on which to form a system, either social, moral, or religious' [III, 182], then his significance derives from his believing it and yet wanting to repudiate his belief.

The effect of this dichotomy on Carleton's work is plain enough. From a biographical standpoint, the fact that he is a figure in transit between the two irreconcilable zones of national life, and that as a result perhaps must be a man divided in himself, may be the reason why his work is so uneven. However, it was these very fissures which Carleton was so intent on masking. It may well be that, to a modern reader, 'Carleton...fails to be an Irish

Scott because he is himself a character out of Scott, he is part of Scott's subject-matter',⁶³ but such an evaluation must be placed alongside Carleton's own obvious intentions. His failure to emulate Scott is caused by his choosing not to be an historical novelist, a decision created in part by the difficulty experienced in the matter of perspective, caused in its turn by an intensely vivid sense of the presentness of the people and the problem of keeping faith with them. Admittedly, such failures are of an important imaginative nature; but in a sense Carleton is less interested in the imaginative character of his work than in the clash between two realms of truth, one denoted by his material and the other by his attitude towards it. The imaginative means availed of in attempting to accommodate one realm in the other are for the most part gimcrack, melodramatic and unoriginal, and contribute less to the desired reconciliation than the objectionable editorialising. Nevertheless, the urge to reconcile, to cohere, to find the world acceptable and sufficient, despite its gauche methods, is certainly significant. To assign meaning to the inchoate, to attempt to derive the integration of story from the randomness of trait, proved ultimately to be beyond Carleton's artistic powers, but the very passion of his effect deepened and extended the possibilities of Irish fiction. Even if this results in the claim that 'The most notable thing about Carleton is that one feels him to be waiting for Ireland, not for England',⁶⁴ the extent of his contribution is not to be denied.

Carleton, rather than following in a tradition, assisted in the creation of one. His version of life on the land is more vivid, active and driven than any other. At the same time it does assert the necessity that life on the land be made viable. The

nature of Carleton's contribution to the continuing preoccupation with life on the land, or with the fictionally-derived conception of such a life, denotes his relation with tradition.

Whereas Maria Edgeworth projected preconditions for the inception - or re-establishment - of life on the land, based on the suppression of a personal sense in favour of supposedly objective models of necessary entailments, Carleton is openly personal and derives his outlook from his 'feel' for life on the land. Although Edgeworth's work has a clear documentary interest, this simply facilitates the author's intellectual gloss. Carleton on the other hand is most convincing not for his intellectual interventions - though, as I've already argued, these are vital to the character he wanted to impose on his material; his main strength is to be found in his emphasis on the non-intellectual content of his work, that is on its emotional nature. If Edgeworth is committed to the recommencement of life on the land, Carleton is absorbed by the preservation of life on the land as it should be. That is, Edgeworth's is an intellectual projection, Carleton's an emotional one.

Carleton's emphasis on the indiscipline and vitality of mind betokened by emotional energy (the peasantry's only real hope of a purchase on life), and on the inevitably mistaken schemes of action generated by that energy, pervades all of Carleton's work, not only the Traits and Stories. Even when dealing with as dire a topic as famine in his novel The Black Prophet, he insists, in a preface notable otherwise for its social and political pugnacity:

Let not the reader imagine, however, that the principal interest of this tale is drawn from so gloomy a topic as famine. The author trusts that the workings of those

passions and feelings which usually agitate human life, and constitute the character of those who act in it, will be found to constitute its chief attraction.⁶⁵

Yet, although so much of Carleton's being (his artistic persona as well as the rest of him - unluckily, though like the vast majority of his contemporaries, he didn't distinguish between man and artist in himself) is absorbed in matters of emotional integrity, its possibility and justification, there is something in his work which finds the emotions untrustworthy, evanescent, the changeable features of the face of fate. This much may already be obvious from the careers of Owen M'Carthy and Jemmy M'Evoy: their purity of heart eventually justifies their elevation to an unrealistically high level of good fortune, with a resulting diminution of their interest or reality as characters. But this view is clearly not shared by Carleton. His reading of those careers is that of a moralist; he believes that Owen and Jemmy deserve what they finally receive, since the genesis of the need in the first place is unjustified - in both cases, cold-hearted and amoral manipulation is the cause of deprivation. In stories where the emotions are a less prescriptively integrating influence, however, one notes Carleton's objection to them as a source, or basis, of life (one might say, more simply, of social or public behaviour, if all three terms were not interchangeable, as indicated by Carleton's abhorrence of secrecy and his artistic difficulty in dealing with solitude and privacy). Objection is made particularly strongly to the hardening of feeling into will; though the dangers of random egocentricity are also noisily adumbrated.

Admittedly it is a testament to Carleton's genuineness that he neither dismissed the emotional life of his people or regarded it as a reliable basis for their existence. Yet, if the

intellectual framework which he adopted as a means of viewing critically that vital, pre-conscious life into which he was born, is intended to be an example of what peasant life needed to achieve contemporaneity and wholeness (to rid the land of its own restless craving), it is a failure. It fails precisely through being a framework, since as such it either overpowers emotional energies or intensifies them to a pitch of irrationalism. In effect, Carleton's immature, ramshackle intellectual contrivance reveals a fundamental reality of peasant existence only to adulterate it. Desperate to assert his own position by ascribing meanings to every vestige of the world he abandoned - abandoned in a quest for meanings - he employs an acquired framework to finalise the work of abandonment, to seal off his world.

The emotional vitality of his people ultimately strikes one, in Carleton's representation of it, as the most crucial aspect of their disenfranchisement. It remains arguable whether the picture of teeming cabin life is actually a sketch for something more Hogarthian and chaotically claustrophobic. In any case, the generally narrow scope of Carleton's physical settings - his reliance on the stock situation, and on the particular case which has to make room for itself within the given situation - is simply, though powerfully, evidence for my more general point. Although emotionalism is such a force in the life of the peasantry, its only beneficial effect is to render the nature of that life acceptable. Carleton is careful to ensure that value of an ontological character reposes in the processes of acceptance. His argument is certainly not casually, or idly, conservative, regardless of its intellectual origins. And by making this point I am not accusing Carleton of failing to be a political radical.

Nevertheless, the desire informing his work is not that life on the land should be seen in terms of its actual difficulties alone, but in terms of their abolition. This would mark a return to an earlier, more integrated, more vision-sustaining set of conditions. Such a train of thought presents Carleton as a seeker of another kingdom. But it presents his people as important because they can be defined - that is, they can obtain to expressive stability - in visionary terms. According to the Traits and Stories, should they attempt anything else, physical destruction and spiritual degradation ensues. Carleton's advice to his people, thus, is not to violate their emotional lives but allow them to be the guarantors of the need for defences against material vicissitudes. Such advice effectively debars the peasant from consciousness, from obtaining an overall view of his existence. Instead it implicitly encourages him to regard his condition subjectively, to abide by the promptings of his heart. This is the outlook of the virtuous victim, and in my view such a rationalisation effectively cancels out the claims which have been made for Carleton as a writer of the peasantry. Of course he is their most eloquent and comprehensive delineator, but when he exceeds this function his work rapidly deteriorates.

There is one important exception to this judgement, however, and that is his representation of place and the values which inhere in it. From the standpoint of his intellectual rationalisations, Carleton's work is naive and in a sense heartless. These rationalisations govern his plots - or, rather, pre-empt plotting; providing, instead, rhetorical figments of meaningful and non-meaningful action. His characters, despite their various incidental graces, suffer from

the over-determination of their function, brought about by the author's ur-plots. Although not exactly uncontaminated by these practices, Carleton's sense of place is the most positive and revealing of his creative effects, since its contribution seems to rely on artistic application which, even if itself an imitation, is at least an imitation of an animating literary value. A sense of place, however, is not the same as a sense of nature, or at least to my mind, signifies a more elementary sense of creation.

Significant as Carleton's work on place is, it does not make him 'the demiurge of a new tradition.' On the contrary, in my view, it makes him an important contributor to an established line of thought, that of Edgeworth. Where her contribution consisted of the projection of a desire for place, Carleton shows the place itself, though surrounded by such sizeable defining qualifications that it too ultimately emerges as a projection, revealing subjective desire, not artistic coherence. But even so, the materialisation, however limited by fabrication, of place and the guarantee of a continuing life of the people within it is more than Edgeworth could depict. In addition, the character of place - an enclave wherein a unique culture could thrive - does finally show Carleton to be a significant contributor to the idea of life on the land.

For Edgeworth the relationship between identity and community was one primarily thought of as being socially desirable. Thus it is presented as a matter of choice, of morally informed, judiciously objective decision - or at least that's the spirit behind the presentation. At any rate intellectual and judgemental procedures come before emotional ones. With Carleton, as we've seen, emotional considerations are so pre-eminent as apparently to make irrelevant

intellectual ones (that is, from the point of view of characterisation, not from that of authorship). For him the relationship between identity and community is so intense and rarified, is so compulsively enacted in terms of primary and inscrutable associations (a maudlin, yet affectingly primitive, acknowledgement of creation), is ultimately the substance of a forcefully projected vision (as distinct from the cogently projected 'solution' found in Edgeworth), that its terms can only be depicted in a chaos of disparate imaginative modes:

Of any Ulster writer writing about the land, Carleton has the most elaborate and effective disguise for the absence of deep thought and a realistic vision. This disguise takes the form of generic and stylistic richness, of an amazing medley of farce, burlesque, gothic, romance, melodrama, fitful realism, satire; of the fictional, the polemical and the documentary.⁶⁵

The uneasy coexistence of many of these modes within a single story is an indication of Carleton's recklessness: 'in the craft of literary expression he was without that subconscious preparation which comes of a man's familiarity with masterpieces in the language that he is to use.'⁶⁷

Yet such ignorance also testifies to both the strength and the character of his subjective awareness. Its strength derives from Carleton's retention of the quality of energy which in his work was viewed with disquiet, problematically. As to its character, the very proliferation of modes suggests Carleton's indifference to literary value as such. But it also suggests that a self-consciously artistic exploitation of intrinsically literary methods would adulterate the primacy of feeling which is Carleton's overwhelming preoccupation. Thus he can only assert, by running the gamut (or, one may feel, the gauntlet) of rhetorical effects,

the terms of the all-important relationship between identity and community.

Carleton, finally, is best considered as complementing Maria Edgeworth, extending and critically testing her thought of inaugurating a new order based on eighteenth century notions of honour, duty and strength of will. Although ill-equipped for thinking through programmes of this kind, Carleton accepts most of these findings, while adding a vital one of his own, an insistence on the viability of the life of place, and its propensity to confer and conserve identity. It remains now to see how this projection of viability was, in turn, placed under stress in the work of Charles Lever.

Yet, although I believe that Carleton the writer most obviously attains to significance when viewed in the context of nineteenth century Irish fiction, instead of being regarded as a freak emanation, one should perhaps conclude by paying tribute to the man. His presentation of the Irish peasantry may have been reactionary and thus have failed to achieve decisive moral significance. Nevertheless, it does represent an important breakthrough for which the man himself - for all the confusion, the thoughtlessness which was its symptom, and the self-pity which came at the end of all - remains as singular and adamant as he appeared to a luminary of his day - 'an Irish peasant lifting a head like Slive Donard over his contemporaries.'⁶⁸

FOOTNOTES

CHAPTER II

- 1 W.B. Yeats, 'William Carleton', Bookman, March 1896. Reprinted in John P. Frayne (ed.) Uncollected Prose by W.B. Yeats, Vol.I, (London, Macmillan, 1970), pp.394-5.
- 2 Benedict Kiely, Poor Scholar. A Study of the Works and Days of William Carleton (1794-1869) ([London, 1947]; Dublin, The Talbot Press, 1972), p.44. Hereafter, Kiely.
- 3 Herbert A. Kenny, Literary Dublin (Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1974), p.89.
- 4 D.J. O'Donoghue, The Life of William Carleton: Being his autobiography and letters; and an account of his life and writings, from the point at which the autobiography breaks off, by David J. O'Donoghue. With an introduction by Mrs. Cashel Hoey. (London, Downey, 2 vols., 1896), p.174. Hereafter, Life, with vol. and page numbers.
- 5 Mrs. Cashel Hoey, 'Introduction', Life I, p.xliii.
- 6 Quoted in Life, II, p.305.
- 7 Augustus J.C. Hare, Life and Letters of Maria Edgeworth (London, Edward Arnold, 2 vols, 1894), II, pp.148, 167 records her opinions of the Banim brothers (i.e. 'the O'Hara family') and Gerald Griffin, respectively.
- 8 Letter of D.P. Starkey to Maria Edgeworth, June 26, 1848, quoted in Life, II, pp.124-5.

Kenny, op.cit., p.87, remarks that 'Miss Edgeworth came to say that not until she had read Carleton did she really know Irish life.'
- 9 Maria Edgeworth died less than a year after Starkey's letter on May 22, 1849.
- 10 Thomas Flanagan, The Irish Novelists 1800-1850 (New York, Columbia University Press, 1959), p.256.
- 11 Life, II, p.279.
- 12 Life, I, p.101.
- 13 Carleton includes Lady Morgan and Mrs. Hall in this encomium. Traits and Stories, ed.cit., I, pp.xxviii-xxix. Hence my view of its generality.
- 14 Letter of Dr. Shelton Mackenzie to Carleton, March 2, 1852. Life, II, p.174.

- 15 John Wilson Foster, Forces and Themes in Ulster Fiction (Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1974), pp.16-17.
- 16 Patrick Murray, 'Traits of the Irish Peasantry', Edinburgh Review, Vol.96 (October 1852), p.388.
- 17 Thomas Davis, 'Habits and Character of the Peasantry', reprinted in T.W. Rolleston (ed.) Prose Writings of Thomas Davis (London, Walter Scott, n.d.), p.183.
- 18 Flanagan, op.cit., p.255.
- 19 Roger McHugh, 'William Carleton. A Portrait of the Artist as Propagandist', Studies, Vol.27 (1938), p.47.
- 20 F.V. Barry (ed.), Maria Edgeworth: Chosen Letters, (London, Jonathan Cape, 1931), p.435.
- 21 Kiely, p.79.
- 22 Mary Buckley, 'Attitudes to Nationality in Four Nineteenth Century Novelists: II, William Carleton', Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, Vol.78, no.229 (1974), p.113.
- 23 Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry originally appeared in two series, the first, Dublin, 2 vols., 1830; the second, Dublin, 3 vols., 1833. Citations below are from D.J. O'Donoghue's edition of the 'Traits and Stories' (London, Dent, 4 vols. 1896), volume and page numbers accompanying initial mention of stories to be examined and subsequent citations from them.
- 24 Flanagan, op.cit., p.256.
- 25 Donald Davie, The Heyday of Sir Walter Scott, (London, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1961), pp.98-9.
- 26 Flanagan, op.cit., p.316.
- 27 Patrick Kavanagh, 'Preface', The Autobiography of William Carleton (London, MacGibbon & Kee, 1968), p.11, remarks, 'he was no more a peasant than is your obedient servant.' (This book is a reprint of Life, I.)
- 28 Kiely, pp.50-1.
- 29 Flanagan, op.cit., p.295.
- 30 Life, I, p.109.
- 31 Life, I, p.211-2.
- 32 Kiely, p.36.
- 33 Life, I, p.148.

- 34 Quoted in Life, II, pp.13-14.
- 35 Life, II, p.22.
- 36 Life, I, p.83.
- 37 Life, I, p.53.
- 38 Life, I, pp.85-6.
- 39 Life, I, p.101.
- 40 Life, II, p.3.
- 41 Preface to Traits and Stories of the Irish Peasantry (1st series); reprinted in O'Donoghue, ed.cit., I, p.xxv.
- 42 H.S. Krans, Irish Life in Irish Fiction (New York, Columbia University Press, 1903), pp.259-60.
- 43 Carleton, in common with most of his Irish literary contemporaries, believed facts (see n.41) to be the basis of truth, thereby tending to discount imagination.

'I have written many works upon Irish life, and up to the present day the man has never lived who could lay his finger upon any passage of my writings, and say "that is false"
'Preface', Valentine M'Clutchy, the Irish Agent (2nd ed., Dublin 1846), p.vii.
- 44 Life, I, p.29.
- 45 See, for example, 'Ned M'Keown', ed.cit., I, pp.2-4. A more generalised sense of, and socio-economic basis for, this attitude underlies 'Tubber Derg' (IV, p.13).
- 46 Life, I, p.212.
- 47 Life, I, p.131.
- 48 *ibid.*
- 49 Life, I, p.131.
- 50 Anthony Meehan, villain in chief of 'The Donagh; or The Horse-Stealers' (ed.cit., Vol.III, pp.1-33) is another case in point.
- 51 Kiely, p.86.
- 52 An example of how unnatural and artistically disastrous such an approach could be for Carleton is Jane Sinclair; or The Fawn of Springvale (serially, Dublin University Magazine, vol.8, nos. 45-48 (September-December, 1836); in book form, The Fawn of Springvale, or Jane Sinclair, and other tales (Dublin, 2 vols., 1841).

- 53 This phrase occurs not in ed.cit., but in the text used for 'Tubber Derg' by Yeats in his compilation, Stories from Carleton (London, Walter Scott, n.d.), p.141.
- 54 This generalised description of my analysis views Owen M'Carthy's subjectivism as a form of naive egotism. Although the discussion may not have focussed directly on this view, it allows for it. Moreover, in Owen's case, cure seems more important than prevent or even aetiology.
- 55 Flanagan, op.cit., pp.313-4.
- 56 This aspect of Jemmy's intentions has interesting effects on the story's language, noted by H.J. O'Brien, 'The Poor Scholar: The Oral Style of William Carleton', Aquarius, Vol.4 (1971), pp.74-82.
- 57 Life, I, p.35.
- 58 In the words of Jemmy M'Evoy's mentor, Father O'Brien, 'Truth... is the foundation of all eloquence...Fiction is successful only be borrowing her habiliments...' (III, 270).
- 59 'The arrogance which Carleton imputes to them is possibly an exaggeration; it may be no more than a caustic reference to their innocent pride and vanity.' P.J. Dowling, The Hedge Schools of Ireland (Cork, The Mercier Press, 1968), p.86.
- 60 H.J. O'Brien, op.cit., pp.79-80.
- 61 Kiely, p.29.
- 62 Yeats's phrase. Allen Wade (ed.), The Letters of W.B. Yeats (London, Rupert Hart-Davis, 1954), p.143.
- 63 Donald Davie, op.cit., p.99.
- 64 Stephen Gwynn, Irish Literature and Drama (London, Nelson, 1936), p.68.
- 65 'Preface', The Black Prophet (Belfast, Simms & M'Intyre, 1847) p.iv.
- 66 Foster, op.cit., p.16.
- 67 Gwynn, op.cit., p.66.
- 68 Charles Gavan Duffy, My Life in Two Hemispheres (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 2 vols., 1898), II, p.155.

CHAPTER IIICHARLES LEVER1 Introduction

If, from a biographical and cultural point of view, Carleton and Maria Edgeworth are vastly different from one another, and may be associated only in terms of the similarity of their artistic account of the condition of Ireland question, Charles James Lever (1806-1872) must also be treated as significantly distinct and also crucially related.

He is distinct for a variety of reasons. In the first place, unlike his predecessors, he was born to arguably the most anonymous class in the Ireland of his day, the Protestant middle-class of Dublin. In social background therefore he occupies a position 'equidistant'¹ from those occupied by Carleton and Edgeworth. By virtue of this, however, he was deprived of immediate, natural access to the basic condition of contemporary reality, life on the land. Thus, even if, due to experiences as a dispensary doctor in Kilrush, co. Clare and Portstewart, co. Derry during the cholera epidemic of 1832, he did observe at first hand a particularly vicious example of the vulnerability to which life on the land was prone, his rendering of it tends to lack the vividness and detail of an Edgeworth or a Carleton. Considering the impact which such an initiation to life on the land presumably made, it is interesting to note how sparingly Lever used the experience. (It occurs centrally in only one novel, St. Patrick's Eve (1845), and peripherally, though importantly, in The Martins of Cro' Martin (1856).²)

Another significant difference between Lever and the two other subjects of this thesis is that he alone received a University

education. In view of Maria Edgeworth's intellectual background, and Carleton's chequered but undoubtedly rich book-learning, perhaps not too much emphasis should be placed on this attainment. Two points emerge, however, from Lever's education. The first is that it introduced him to modern literature (despite being a medical student, Lever knew enough to visit Goethe at Weimar during a sojourn abroad in 1828). The second is that it provided a context for the scapegrace expressions of his restless nature, which are a recurring feature of his erratic and somewhat unstable career, as well as introducing him to the best minds of his generation, many of whom would shortly distinguish themselves by founding and contributing to the Dublin University Magazine. Thus, as a result of his time at Trinity, Lever was socially (and, more arguably, intellectually) well placed to participate in the articulation of cultural nationalism, the Ascendancy's first significant contribution to national life since the Act of Union. In contrast, Maria Edgeworth neither created nor particularly encouraged such concerns, while Carleton, as we've seen, was in no position to control outlets for his work.

As well as being culturally and socially distinct, Lever differs from my other two subjects in the extent of his contemporary popularity, his financial success, and his standing as a well-known, if insignificant (because powerless), figure in the Victorian literary market place. Unlike Carleton, whose career is stained with poverty throughout, Lever did extremely well out of literature, and lived extravagantly by his pen from 1837, when his first novel, The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer, began to be serialised in the Dublin University Magazine, until his death, thirty-five years later. Unlike Maria Edgeworth, whose writing career may be

regarded not as a career in a modern sense but as an important example of her efforts to live a dutiful, useful life (that is, writing was closely related in spirit to pedagogy and estate management), Lever cultivated the notion of a public role for himself on the basis of his being a writer.

At different times, Lever was a close acquaintance of Thackeray, who dedicated his Irish Sketch Book to him, 'a friend from whom I have received a hundred acts of kindness and cordial hospitality';³ Dickens (the failure of Lever's serial novel A Day's Ride: A Life's Romance in 'All the Year Round' seems to have precipitated Dickens's setting to work on Great Expectations⁴); and Trollope. To the latter, in part, we owe the traditional view of Lever the man:

How shall I speak of my dear old friend Charles Lever, and his rattling, jolly, joyous, swearing Irishmen. Surely never did a sense of vitality come so constantly from a man's pen, nor from man's voice, as from his! I knew him well for many years, and whether in sickness or in health, I have never come across him without finding him to be running over with wit and fun. Of all the men I have encountered, he was the surest fund of drollery. I have known many witty men, many who could say good things, many who would sometimes be ready to say them when wanted, though they would sometimes fail; - but he never failed.⁵

This view has become traditional not only because of the authority of its source but because the early novels which made his name are suffused with unselfconscious spiritedness, brimming with incidents and characters that are boyishly larger than life. As well as assuming the name of his first novel's eponymous hero for a time, Lever admitted in later life, 'in sketching Harry Lorrequer I was in no great measure depicting myself' [1, p.xvi]. The result of this view has given Lever an unenviable reputation.

Ever since Carleton denounced him in the Nation for 'habitual plagiarism, impudence and lack of taste',⁶ Lever has had a largely hostile press, being condemned as a mere 'literary businessman',⁷ and for producing novels which 'are travesties, because they are not written out of any deep concern for his subject'.⁸ Even those willing to concede that 'Lever...was much more than a rattlepate and farce-monger', feel obliged to add, 'It was his ill-fortune that by the time he had begun to take both life and the art of fiction seriously, he should have lost some of his earlier lightness and freshness, and should too frequently have dulled his style by over-production'.⁹

Lever, despite commercial success, a certain degree of contemporary professional eminence, and the stimulus of acquaintance with the leading authors of his time, remains a tissue of contradictions, tensions and paradoxes. And it is precisely because this tissue receives its most explicit character in his novels that he may be regarded as the ultimate and conclusive embodiment of the vicissitudes attending the practice of nineteenth century Irish fiction, and an artistic comrade of both Maria Edgeworth and William Carleton. The very fact of his success as a Victorian best-selling author made him objectionable to nationalist elements at home. In exile (he left Ireland in 1845 for the Continent, returning only for a few brief visits), he produced novels which comprise 'a broad transitional survey of Irish society',¹⁰ and received no credit for doing so on the Irish cultural front. He was a man of two worlds, the definitive Anglo-Irish condition.¹¹ Like Carleton and Edgeworth his mature work tries to reconcile what is and what should be with regard to the condition of Ireland question. More revealingly, perhaps, in view of his limited first

hand experience of life on the land, Lever's model of reconciliation is fundamentally identical to that of his predecessors. He too, despite idiosyncratic differences of cultural emphasis and artistic manner, projects a vision of necessary and total interrelationship between identity and community.

This projection receives its clearest and most comprehensive expression in some of the novels written by the mature Lever in exile. The main burden of my evaluation of Lever's fiction will dwell on three of these, The Daltons (1852), The Martins of Cro' Martin (1856) and Luttrell of Arran (1865).¹² Like much else connected with this author's erratic career, Lever's oeuvre may be made to conform to patterns of different kinds (a feature it shares with the works of Edgeworth and Carleton). The novels I've selected for my main discussion are as different as possible in tone and concern from the early military novels. It is necessary to pay some attention to the latter, however, in order to clarify what's meant by referring to a mature Lever. And since the works of his maturity were written in exile, some account must be given of the circumstances leading to his quitting the national stage.

(i) Lever and Harry Lorrequer

It is typical of Lever's formative years, which in personal terms were characterised by chronic restlessness and undergraduate joie de vivre, that he should have a brilliant beginning to a glamorous literary life not by applying himself in a conscious effort to do so, or even in thinking very seriously about either the form or the content of the work, but by simply and unreflectingly meeting the requirements of a popular contemporary sub-genre, the military novel.

Some years before Lever began his artistic career, a description of the genre occurred which serves to the letter, virtually, the newcomer's approach to his subject:

They are composed, for the most part, with ease and freedom; their style is seldom ambitiously elaborated, and is rendered pleasant by its conversational flow, and unaffected picturesqueness. Their authors, generally, have not been successful in the conduct of their plots. They seem to have strung together such adventures as their experience would enable them to describe with the happiest effect, and frequently allow the novelist almost to disappear into the biographer and the tourist. Some of them would evidently have succeeded better in the latter capacities; and have probably been tempted by the fascinating capabilities of the novel, more than by any consciousness of skill, to embody the fruits of their professional experience in a composition of this form.¹³

It is probably more accurate to describe Lever as a latecomer, rather than as a newcomer, to the military novel. His contribution, however, altered the balance of ingredients noted in the above description. Because of his complete lack of first hand military experience, Lever was obviously required to be more frankly novelistic in his treatment of the material. In doing so, however, he managed to clarify the artistic pedigree of the genre, by implying, and to a certain extent developing, its relationship to the historical novel proper. (Due to the immaturity of his artistic consciousness during this phase of his career, Lever did not succeed in making this relationship explicit. Nevertheless, in his most elaborate military novel, Tom Burke of 'Ours' (1844) there is a submerged but distinctive note of misgiving as to the personal significance of the historical process which Thackeray explores to such convincing effect in The History of Henry Esmond (1852).) Moreover, the absence of direct personal experience enabled Lever to dwell on those aspects of the material which he found most temperamentally attractive, and in doing so gave fictional form to its spirit instead of presenting it as merely a colourful

case history of certain circumstances.

The aspects of military material to which Lever responded, and which supply the narrative interest in these early works, are boyish adventure and its attendant unpredictability, momentary fluctuations of fortune, the ratification of personal worth to be derived from . . . nts of foolhardy courage, the desirable sense of definition that accrues to serving a cause, and the ultimate triumph of honourable behaviour. Such themes are dealt with generically, with little or no concern for particularity. In fact when an attempt at particularity is made - as in Charles O'Malley (1841) during the eponymous hero's escapades at the battle of Waterloo, or Tom Burke of 'Ours' when Tom has his interview with Napoleon - the result is a chronic loss of balance in the narrative.

Rather than events in themselves assisting in narrative development, response to events and a predisposition to face eventualities in the correct manner (namely the most honourable and least selfconscious) are responsible for narrative momentum. The inherent unpredictability of events, aggravated by conditions of active service, is counteracted by the hero's inbuilt and unexamined capacity to absorb and overcome it. Military experience, though producing temporary reversals and discomforts, emerges ultimately as a rite de passage culminating in that nirvana of non-experience, the arms of fair lady (traditional prize of those not afflicted with faint heart).

Events, therefore, are not presented as set-piece recapitulations of military endeavour in its own right. They are intended as generic representations of what constitutes the hero's character. A sense of this is contained in one of Lever's remarks on The Confession of Harry Lorrequer:

I have neither story nor moral - my only pretension to the one is the detail of a passion which marked some years of my life; my only attempt at the other, the effort to show how prolific in hairbread 'scapes may a man's career become, who, with a warm imagination and easy temper, believes too much, and rarely can feign a part without forgetting that he is acting. [I, xxvii].

The concept of generic representation is suggested here in the reference to theatricality, as it is in Lever's description of his first novel as 'these hastily-written and rashly-conceived sketches' [I, xxv], but while a modern reader may be tempted to emphasise the cartoon-like character of the set-pieces in these early works, perhaps the most appropriate term is that used by Lever himself regarding Jack Hinton the Guardsman: 'tableaux'.¹⁴

It will be noted from Lever's remarks that the creation of effects was of more interest to him than the articulation of meaning. This is partly due to the amateurish spirit in which he approached his work. Despite the popular acclaim which greeted his first novel, he had at the time no thought of 'future authorship.. ~~for less~~ did I dream of abandoning my profession as a physician for the precarious livelihood of the pen' [I, xvi].

The interest in effects is also the result of a desire to bring into being a non-critical literature, this being the chief characteristic of Lever's young heroes: it is in being non-critical, in neglecting to develop a particularised awareness of himself and the world in favour of adapting a celebrative (some might say posturing) attitude transmitted in generic terms, that Lever's acknowledged identification with Harry Lorrequer achieves its significance. Lever's career, beginning on this note of the irrelevance of consciousness, continues to be haunted, with increasing severity, by what it sought to jettison.

While it probably will never be known whether Lever was influenced by contemporary criticism of the military novel, there is an excellent biographical reason why such information is not germane. This reason is Lever's friendship with William Hamilton Maxwell, perhaps the leading exponent of military fiction, who in his Wild Sports of the West (1832) had already attempted to translate the spirit of blithe, inconclusive adventurism into a depiction of life on the land. It is more in keeping with Lever's temperament that he should receive the stimulus to write as a result of a social encounter rather than from a sense of artistic awareness.

Maxwell (1792-1850) whose most popular work of military fiction is Stories of Waterloo (1829) - reviewed quite favourably by T.H. Lister in the article quoted above - had seen active service in the Peninsular Campaign. On leaving the army, he took orders and obtained the living at Ballagh, Connemara, 'a place destitute of congregation.'¹⁵ Lever met him when he was visiting Portstewart, a fashionable seaside resort, where Lever was the local dispensary doctor. It is not impossible that the stimulus worked with the wonderful facility suggested by one source, though the account says more about Lever's impressionability than it does about his literary aspirations:

To Lever at this period Maxwell was a literary demigod. The two men exchanged views about Irish life and character, and Maxwell fired the dispensary doctor with a desire to beget a novel of adventure.¹⁶

By using the tones of local colour found in Wild Sports of the West and framing them in the context of a subaltern's adventures (or, alternatively, using the commonplaces of military fiction and placing them in an unfamiliar regional setting), Lever, with no particular intention, began his literary career. Yet it is precisely

because of the accidental, undetermined, anti-pedantic, artistically unpretentious character of those early works that they were so successful. Lever's own account of his sources reveals his macaronic mind and how little he considered formal, artistic expression to be part of his concerns. Of the stories, or as I've called them above, the set-pieces, which in their very variety denote narrative progress, he wrote,

many of them heard in boyhood, others constructed out of real incidents that had occurred to my friends in travel, and some again...actual facts, well known to many who had formed part of the army of occupation in France. [I, xv].

Again, one notes the sense of rendering material for its own sake rather than for interpretative, much less ideological, reasons. The evasion of ideological implications, in particular, is revealing, bearing in mind the character of military institutions and activity (especially in the context of a subject nation) and also, thanks to the Dublin University Magazine, the fact that for the first time in its history, Irish culture was becoming ideologically self-conscious.

In a word, then, Lever's military novels are escapist. But while this term describes their orientation, it does not account for the cultural and artistic significance of escapism. It is because Lever himself dispensed with any thought of such significance inhering in his material that these novels must be regarded as repositories of unexamined presuppositions. Indifference to specific meaning and particularised coherence is more revealing in its omissions than in its occasions. And, as we shall see, such evasions and indifference provide an eloquent preamble to the difficulties which Lever attempts to confront and resolve in what I've referred to as his mature works. Their maturity - more accurately, their relative maturity - derives from Lever no longer

committing such deliberate and wholesale acts of omission as he does in his early work.

My intention here is to attempt a general characterisation of the artistic and cultural tendencies of Lever's military novels. As might be expected from the sense of the fortuitous central to his approach to authorship, the existence of a general pattern is deeply buried beneath the crazy paving of incessant anecdote and neo-picaresque adventurism, which gives these novels a sense of being all variegated superstructure supported by little or no infrastructure. By concentrating on the stable elements common to all four novels - namely their use of the armed forces as an expressive means of self-verification for their young heroes - a general characterisation will emerge.

In fairness to Lever, however, it must be said that in detail there is little resemblance between the works. That's to say that whatever general character they articulate comes from the core material of hero and army. Two of the novels feature young English officers on a tour of duty in Ireland (Harry Lorrequer and Jack Hinton), while the other two deal with young Irishmen who, for domestic reasons, are obliged to join an army and serve abroad. Even though there are important differences between The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer and Tom Burke of 'Ours', it may be observed that they have in common the displaced young whose only ostensible rationale is service. In other words, despite the obvious lack of an intention on Lever's part to conceive of his military novels as a coherent quartet, containing obviously progressive thematic developments and refinements of technique in dealing with them, there are stable, recurring elements which, by virtue of their recurrence

and the fact that Lever has an uncritical dependence on them, provide a basis for speaking of the quartet in terms of its general characteristics.

But as a quartet, these novels interrelate most unevenly. The rollicking, mildly satirical adventures of the two English heroes are different in significant ways from the more obviously social bearing of Charles O'Malley's and Tom Burke's careers. In the case of the latter, in fact, Lever

...had surprised his friends and subconsciously embarrassed himself by making his hero a violent nationalist. This had been necessary to account for his entering the French army...Lever was forced by verisimilitude into carrying Tom through scenes of oppression and cruelty during the epoch of autocratic rule that followed the collapse of the rebellion of 1798.¹⁷

Rather than responding to the requirements of verisimilitude Lever, in depicting the Irish trauma of '98, may have been striking a more obvious didactic note (not for nothing is this novel dedicated to Maria Edgeworth: 'a name - first in my country's literature'), in order to bring home to his hero the verdict of one of his French mentors on Ireland: 'this land of anarchy and misfortune' [V, 87].

Nevertheless, even if it is fanciful to suggest that Tom Burke is a typical figure of nineteenth century Irish fiction - the landless waif against history¹⁸ (simply because he is not typical), his career is markedly different from that of Charles O'Malley. Both young men share the condition of landlessness, but for different reasons: Tom Burke is deprived of his by family machinations, while Charles O'Malley is temporarily unable to come into his inheritance because of his volatile nature. In the other pair of novels we find the same mixture of congruent and divergent material. The most obvious example from this pair is that Jack Hinton is given a specific mission to carry out in deepest Ireland (namely, the West),

whereas Harry Lorrequer's presence remains unattenuated and immune from any specific sense of motivation. Such an irregular rhythm of thematic alignments and deviations as we find underlying the quartet reveals an artistic feature in Lever's approach similar to that shared by Edgeworth and Carleton. Not only is unevenness common to the oeuvre of all three novelists (and Lever's military novels may be taken as a repository of characteristics replicated throughout his canon). In addition that unevenness is expressive of the tension contained in the author's sense of his material. Even if the subject matter of these early novels by Lever is ostensibly entirely different to that used by Edgeworth and Carleton, the effects he intends to create by his distinctive usage carries an implicit (or underdeveloped) burden of meaning similar, both in character and in content, to that which is more accessibly present in the work of his forerunners.

The fact that the burden of meaning is less declared in Lever's work might be seen to suggest that he is more artistically deft than Edgeworth or Carleton. As stated earlier, he certainly is more willing to indulge his fascination in the superficialities of fictional creation than either of them. (It should be noted, however, that neither Edgeworth nor Carleton are free of excessive and distracting bouts of creative self-indulgence, most obviously, verbal embellishment. In their case, and that of Lever, such deficiencies in consistency of utterance represent unexamined misgivings regarding the stability of form. These misgivings, in their turn, are a facsimile of the tensions latent - and, indeed, not so latent - in their common preoccupations.)

However, in contrast to Edgeworth and Carleton, Lever is unwilling to either nail his own ideological colours to the mast

(arguably an artistically healthy reluctance), nor is he interested in examining the ideological implications of his material. The latter omission is serious because in resisting ideological obligation Lever is attempting to remain unaffected by the atmosphere of contemporary Irish culture. Such aloofness might also be thought desirable had Lever succeeded in making its terms as impressive and crucial as those of that which he was resisting. But he didn't succeed in providing an artistically strong alternative, with results that become painfully clear when we remember the function of ideological intervention by Edgeworth and Carleton. In their work it represented a willed, articulate effort to resolve and allay the tensions of their subject matter, manifested at a less articulate level by the unevenness of both individual text and individual oeuvres.

Typically, such a declared authorial intervention proved to be the most demonstrable example of unevenness, a conclusive representation of that which it was attempting to sublimate. This effect, however, is the clearest statement available of the problematical nature of the material, which I've been labelling its tension, but which might be more accurately described in terms of its possessing two levels of significance, distinct and unrelated, one anthropological and documentary in orientation, the other moralistic and tendentious. While these levels remain distinct, the works in question retain a variegated, diverting character. The unification of levels, however, though intended to carry the force of an authentic reconciliation, is too redolent of cultural rhetoric and artistic sophistry to be satisfying. What emerges as significant, therefore, is the urge to reconcile, not necessarily the mode of reconciliation as such. Such an urge, however, represents the author's willingness to assume ideological respon-

sibility for his work. The following verdict, passed by Lever on Tom Burke of 'Ours' but unfortunately applicable to the overall character of his work, reveals not only one of the basic effects of not directly following in his predecessors' footsteps but also his awareness of such an effect:

I forgot my plan sometimes; sometimes my characters had a will of their own, and would go their own way; and oftener, again, I found I was endeavouring what neither my powers were equal to, nor would meet approval if done; so that my book became a tessellated structure, or rather a patchwork quilt made of shreds and fragments. (V, ix).

The combined acknowledgement of deficiencies in personal application with a wariness of public response eloquently reveal the sole remaining aspect of his talent left to Lever, a consciousness of form. It is precisely with such a consciousness that his military fiction deals, and because of this, it is possible to give a general characterisation of it. Moreover, it is not simply that they express this preoccupation of Lever's, but that such a preoccupation is crucial to his heroes, as might indeed be anticipated in view of their being to a certain extent picaresque throwbacks, combining elements of picaresque sub-types such as 'the awkward fool' and 'the witty adventurer'.¹⁹ (Lever's use of this artistic lineage is predictably uneven, however, being more in evidence in the 'non-Irish' pair of military novels.) Evidence for this preoccupation with form is also supplied by the manner in which Lever himself attempted to relate military fiction to the historical novel proper, an attempt made consistently throughout his career, in novels such as Maurice Tiernay, the Soldier of Fortune²⁰ and, perhaps more subtly, Tony Butler (1865), not to mention the novel with which he first attempted to deal more soberly with a specifically Irish theme, The O'Donoghue; A Tale of Ireland Fifty Years Ago (1845). Although

in intention these novels aspire to be historical novels, what one is left with is a rather pathetic version of the historico-picturesque. All the trappings, colour and issues of the historical novel are present (as one would expect from a lifelong devotee of Scott), but are deprived of the sense of significant jeopardy which, in its effects on the hero of the historical novel, both mediates and delimits cultural awareness (as well as awareness of other kinds) which implicitly kindles ideological awakening: in other words, not only does the historical novel introduce new material to fiction, in the form of local colour and the like, but it also requires that this material be the basis of new forms of relatedness and evaluation. Again, one can only lament the fact that Lever, despite his advantages and his fluent, inventive thematic resourcefulness, did not explore his obvious interests more deeply. On the other hand, had he done so we would not have had his confrontations with the problem of form which I shall be discussing below.

The largely uncritical preoccupation with form to be found at the heart of Lever's military fiction is implicitly characterised in the following description of his archetypal military hero, Harry Lorrequer, a figure possessed of

a strong will and a certain energy, rarely persistent in purpose and perpetually the sport of accident, with a hearty enjoyment of the pleasure of the hour, and a very reckless indifference as to the price to be paid for it. [I, xv-xvi]

This description obscures as much as it reveals. There is no doubt that Lorrequer, as well as his fictional comrades in arms, possesses a certain energy, and it is to its expression that their careers are devoted. But this seems to the reader a result not of a strong will, but rather of an unwilling, naive disposition to

conduct themselves in terms of energetic expressiveness. The character of their careers derives from their collisions with an order inherently more stable (or more inert), more anonymous, but as such curiously friable in its ordinariness: the classic instance of such an order is Irish provincial society, which, however, is seldom if ever depicted in its own right, but as a large-scale, rather amorphous theatrical space in which the hero disports himself. Typically, it is the pretensions, transparencies and inadequacies - in effect, the hollow forms - of provincial life, which Lever's military heroes expose. They do so not as a result of deliberate intention, but rather as a result of misconstrued intention, sometimes on their part, but more usually on the part of the deficient, secular world which is the pretext for their various imbroglios. Thus, the novels proceed by virtue of misrepresentation, solecism, disproportionate reactions, mistaken identity, and in general a highly developed sense of social life as farce. The skirmish, the diversion, the feint, the charge are all adapted to social usage, to the consternation and rout of the less well-trained opposition.

The compulsive pursuit of momentary effects, the ceaseless indulgence of energy which is both impish and anarchic, may be regarded as a legitimate fictional secularisation of the soldier's traditional fixation with 'the bubble reputation'. Yet there is a repetitiveness and inescapability about it (reinforced by the ostensible irrelevance of chronology as an aspect of the military novels' narrative method), which in providing the hero with a rich variety of escapades also suggest his lack of alternative to this style of behaviour. Lever's problematic use of the term 'will' becomes a little more clear if it is seen to mean his hero's willing submission to, acceptance and exploitation of, a lack of

choice regarding his manner of self-presentation. The genus Harry Lorrequer completely identifies with the restricting formula of public behaviour to which soldiering evidently entitles him - identifies with it so comprehensively and unreservedly that the activity of identification is never revealed, much less examined. Lorrequer's incessant pursuit of a life which is constantly in the present is a function of his self-inflicted lack of choice. Repetition replaces standards for comparison. The exaggerated, and (in Lever's view) necessarily expressive, availability of occasions to reinforce the repetitious character of his hero's experience has the effect of being a covert justification for lack of choice. In being willingly deprived of lack of choice, Lever's military hero is automatically stripped of potential individuality. His tenability, therefore, rests on his being the perfect, unchanging and unchangeable repository for energies which he neither seeks to control or analyse, but accepts possession of, with a curiously compelling degree of psychological quietism. One way of describing such a character is as a complete figurehead, a hollow conduit transmitting a sense of the world which by virtue of his embodying it at the same time and to precisely the same extent as he refuses to examine it, reveals him to be comprehensively alienated from everything which is supposed to substantiate him. In a word, he is an accretion of purely formal properties; there is nothing to him but his ever-active presence. Another way of describing him is as a perfect soldier.

The absence, and evident irrelevance, of choice as a crucial factor in the representation and determination of a self is entirely consistent with being a member of the armed forces, particularly as Lever represents them. It is a typical irony of the way

in which Lever's career has been evaluated that those most vocal in their criticism of his portrait of the native should not acknowledge his picture of the army in Ireland contains distortions and modifications of a similar kind. The army is not represented as an instrument of government policy, a socially and culturally oppressive occupying force, nor do we see it undertake any military duties in its Irish sojourns. Indeed the Irish context is specifically dehistoricised, since military engagements, explicitly conceived of as exercises in redrawing the map of Europe (no less), invariably take place abroad. An army devoid of its military relevance for substantial periods - which is what we find for the most part in Lever's military fiction - is analogous to an individual without choice. It has lost, mislaid, or evaded a significant, determining aspect of its reality, and as a result is an army in a purely formal sense. Any interplay between the two formal constructs is, naturally, likely to lack the tension and struggle for viability arising out of a less formal, more deliberately problematical presentation of the material.

Since Lever's military heroes are de-individualised they are complete conformists. The army exists as the superstructural form, accepting and determining its members' conformity, relieving them of their individuality. And even if there is some interplay between the frivolity of the mess and the rigidity of the parade ground, Lever's young subalterns rarely challenge the hold they have allowed the army to take of them. The ultimate outcome of Lorrequer's repetitious scapegrace fooleries is that he remains in the army. If the hero is a shallow container of energies to exploit, the army provides, by means which themselves are subjected to as little scrutiny as those substantiating the hero were subjected to, the

optimum, ratifying form for such energies. It is the most stable institution available, a repository of codes, obligations and a comprehensive, necessary and articulate sense of uniformity. The army enforces the code of 'the done thing'. In identifying with its power to do so, the hero cedes his individuality to a higher end: the honour and glory of the regiment, fidelity to comrades, foolhardy neck-risking under fire - in all of which there is a conspicuous, and conspicuously desirable, element of selflessness.

'Correct form', 'the done thing', when considered in the secular, undisciplined social realm are bound to be subject to misunderstanding and general instability, particularly when the social codes are either (or both) undeveloped and imitative, as they are in Lever's Ireland. The army is ultimately above such considerations, since it provides the hero with the perfect (the most formally significant) opportunity to find a meaningful congruence between himself and the instability which evidently inheres in circumstances wherever they are found. If there is a comic imbalance between the hero's zest and the frailty of those social norms which he encounters, this is redressed in the field of action. In providing a balance, the army provides a structure of meaning to events and a structure of validation for the hero, whose previous experience has been precisely devoid of structure in those terms. As a result of producing an optimum form, of producing meaning through the chaos of the battlefield (indeed, meaning accrues exceptionally and exclusively by this means), Lever is attempting to vivify the abstract values which lie behind and goad his fretful heroes. Meaning resides not in activity as such, but in the spirit in which the activity is undertaken. For all the restrictions on individuality imposed by the evident irrelevance of choice, it is

through them that the hero retains his innocence, his unimpeachability, his lack of ego, his uncontaminated readiness to be repetitious, his essential harmlessness. (It is because his hero never develops that the plots of the military novels always proliferate, never become complex.) Such limitations are not made for the sake of character, but for the sake of preserving intact the values reposed in the author's creation. And in common with Edgeworth and Carleton, not only are Lever's representative heroes archetypally young, they exemplify exactly the same fundamental concern for integrity, honour, impersonal identification with an objectively established code. The emphasis of Lever's values - on honour, unselfishness, gaiety - may be escapist, from an ideological point of view, and there is no denying the influence of that point of view on contemporary Irish cultural life. But in Lever's own view the simple, unqualified assertion of such values was in itself a value.

The integration of character and context posited by Lever (as opposed to being convincingly enacted by his creations) links even these military novels to the fiction of Edgeworth and Carleton. The assertion of integration here is an attenuated, and less articulate, model of the optimum relationship between identity and community proposed by Lever's predecessors. Clearly, the question of identity is very much in evidence by implication in the military novels, commanding attention by virtue of the way Lever overrides it. And although 'the garrison' became a generic term for the Anglo-Irish presence in Ireland, the military presence in Lever's early fiction cannot be considered a synonym for such a sophisticated enclave. The fact that prototypical elements of the central concerns of nineteenth century Irish fiction are present in these works, without being developed beyond the elementary stage,

is a measure of Lever's inattentiveness, or of his too-ready identification with the spirit of Harry Lorrequer. (The latter is certainly a forgivable failing, in view of the fact that it is typical of nineteenth century Irish literature that the biography of each particular author is the clearest possible statement of the problems which his novels seek to overcome. For this reason, it must be regretted that there is so little autobiography produced by Irish authors in the period, whereas, taking Irish literary culture as a whole - in fact nineteenth century Irish culture was, for all practical purposes, exclusively literary - autobiography is one of the strongest and most popular forms. In keeping with this resistance to autobiography on the part of literary artists, one notes their persistent sublimation of their authorial selves into supposedly objective ideological rectitude.)

It must be remembered, however, that Lever's military novels, despite their popularity and notoriety, simply mark the outset of his career. As we shall see, there are distinct similarities between his early and late work. The latter, however, are more articulate attempts at characterising a relationship between identity and community. One reason why they are more articulate is that they are more ideologically aware. Before examining works representative of this development, therefore, we must sketch some account of events leading up to it.

(ii) Lever and Contemporary Irish Culture

In 1842, 'we see the last of Lever as a medical man'.²¹

Despite the outstanding popular success of The Confessions of Harry Lorrequer, Lever continued in his original profession, marking his literary breakthrough only by removing himself and his family from locally fashionable Portstewart to internationally

fashionable Brussels, where after much difficulty and depletion of funds, he established a practice on the edge of diplomatic circles. The pace of keeping up with the standard of living demanded by remaining socially in touch with, and professionally dependent on, such circles soon began to tell on Lever's pocket as well as on his morale, and obliged him to become increasingly reliant on the earnings of his pen. The warm reception which greeted the appearance of Charles O'Malley encouraged this reliance.

At the same time, however, a note of bathetic self-dramatisation begins to accompany his fiction (and from this point onwards is a constant refrain in his correspondence):

They who have never felt the mysterious link that binds the solitary scribe in his lonely study to the circle of his readers, can form no adequate estimate of what his feelings are, when that chain is about to be broken. They know not how often, in the fictitious garb of his narrative, he has clothed the inmost workings of his heart; they know not how frequently he has spoken aloud his secret thoughts, revealing, as though to a dearest friend, the springs of his action, the causes of his sorrow, the sources of his hope; they cannot believe by what a sympathy he is bound to those who bow their heads above his pages; they do not think how the ideal creations of his brain are like mutual friends between him and the world, through whom he is known and felt, and thought of, and by whom he reaps in his own heart the rich harvest of flattery and kindness that are rarely refused to any effort to please, however poor - however humble. They know not this, nor can they feel the hopes, the fears, that stir within him, to earn some passing word of praise - nor think they, when won, what brightness around his humble hearth it may be shedding. These are the rewards for nights of toil and days of thought; these are the recompenses which pay the haggard cheek, the sunken eye, the racked and tired head. These are the stakes for which one plays his health, his leisure, and his life - yet not regrets the game. [U, 493-4]

Fittingly - in view of their tendency to abandon all personal considerations (whose main characteristics are deprivation and solitude, presented as aggravated symptoms of dislocation and uncertainty) in favour of the objectively inevitable requirements

of the role - these words appear above the signature of Harry Lorrequer. Yet, despite the misgivings of this note, it was in this frame of mind, and sporting the soubriquet of his popular hero, that Lever intensified his literary obligations, making them the basis and pretext of a public persona by accepting the editorship of the Dublin University Magazine, commencing with the April 1842 issue.

By this time Lever, in effect, had been absent from Dublin for ten years. Of course he had kept in contact with a section of metropolitan opinion, through the Dublin University Magazine (his first published piece in it having appeared as early as 1836²²). However, due to the éclat created by Harry Lorrequer and the years in Brussels, Lever may have been blinded to, or not fully aware of, the mood of the city and of the country behind it in 1842.

Two years previously. Daniel O'Connell, whose successful campaign for Catholic Emancipation in the late 1820s so distressed Maria Edgeworth, began his agitation for repeal of the Act of Union. Obviously the very thought of such an agitation provided a direct threat to domestic Unionist hegemony, a threat against much more their newly espoused cultural awareness than their traditionally lackadaisical political affiliations. The Unionist constituency in Irish life had been living a contradiction since 1800, when the Act of Parliament incorporating Ireland in Great Britain was passed. The contradiction was presented in terms of the strong Unionist claim to be Irish while relinquishing the primary means whereby their Irishness might be expressed, namely by contributing to the creation of a distinctively Irish body politic, equipped with responsible social organs.

Nevertheless, and possibly as a compensation for political occlusion, in post-Union Dublin, 'cultural life was exceedingly

active'.²³ Unionist claims to Irishness were exclusively vested in cultural interests. 'There is not a simple explanation for this intellectual exuberance';²⁴ yet as well as being perhaps the most vivid example of the spirit of regionalism which swept through the European mind in the early nineteenth century, it also represents in its own right a sublimation of status which Lever's early novels so decisively exemplify. The principal location of this cultural interest was the Dublin University Magazine, which, 'although it hardly ever ceased to put Irish affairs, personalities and interests in the very forefront of its programme, soon established itself on equal terms with the best London reviews, was supported by English advertisers, and was respected all over the world for its literary quality'.²⁵

Lever assumed the prestigious public office of editorship at a crucial juncture in the developing cultural and political situation. In 1842, the Repeal Association was consolidating substantial nationwide adherence (the full impact of which would not be felt, however, until the following year). The mounting groundswell of popular support, a repetition of the means by which O'Connell had gained his earlier success and the creation of which remains conclusive testament of his political genius, represented for the second time in less than twenty years the frailty of public order. The hordes of peasants ostensibly waiting only for the call to throng to O'Connell's 'monster meetings' must have seemed, despite the invariably law-abiding character of these occasions, symptomatic of a deeper propensity to restlessness, dislocation and generally an explicit affront to the significance of form.

Perhaps the consistent representation of Ireland in the pages of the Dublin University Magazine as a fascinatingly rich topos (seen in

the number of topographical, antiquarian and geographical articles it contained) is a subconscious response to the persistent menacing of place characteristic of popular agitation in nineteenth century Ireland, which reached its most spectacular expression under O'Connell's direction. The symbolic meaning of holding the greatest monster meeting yet at Tara, ancient seat of Irish high-kings, in August, 1843, was not lost on O'Connell and his followers. It may also have struck the ideologues of the Ascendancy as a calculated subversion of one of their own ideological premisses. The significance of topos to the creation of a specifically Irish literature should not be underestimated, since it is one of the principle links between this period and the more far-reaching effects of the early Yeats.

In addition to this menacing political atmosphere, in itself exposing the intellectually formal character of Dublin University Magazine ideology, there occurred a more obvious challenge to its outlook six months after Lever's assumption of the editorship, with the appearance, in October 1842, of the Nation newspaper. The very appearance of a newspaper, with its ease of access, portability, and populist associations, is in itself a clear expression of the shift in emphasis, as one of the founding editors was later to claim:

In shape, size distribution of materials and typography, it departed from the ordinary practice of Irish journals, which were immethodical and slovenly in that day. And the new form was designed to typify a new spirit. It took a motto which expressed its exact purpose. ... "To create and foster public opinion in Ireland, and make it racy of the soil."²⁶

The strictures on the production values of, for example, the Dublin University Magazine (much less on the Nation's more obvious forerunner, the Dublin Penny Journal: 'in its day...probably as great an attempt at popular education as the world has seen'²⁷), seem

inappropriate. In an oblique way, however, they suggest that the Nation represents a radical intensification of some of its rivals' commitments.

The Nation's immense impact was due to its being intimately associated with the radical political tide created by the Repeal agitation. Its editors were not simply republican literateurs, but formed (perhaps by virtue of this initial role) the nucleus of the Young Ireland party, a group which from its inception occupied a political position to the left of O'Connell and ultimately broke with him. However, when the Nation's cultural presuppositions are described, they seem to bear a marked family resemblance to those of the Dublin University Magazine:

The ideal was that of an organic hierarchical community within the nation-state, with the efforts of each group directed towards the common good of all.²⁸

However, though the same range of material was common to both ideological camps, the naive and unashamedly propagandist usages to which the Nation put it, makes its outlook, paradoxically, the more effective and realistic one. The objective of the Dublin University Magazine may be generally described as a clarifying and conserving attitude to the national heritage. Young Ireland, in contrast, made that heritage the basis of a contemporary politico-cultural vision. For all its naiveté, and despite the debacle of the 1848 rising which terminated the group's political existence, the vision (of the spirituality of the folk) became the basis of republican ideology, attaining full maturity in the rising of 1916. Yet, irrespective of the political usage of the material, the common deployment of cultural material is revealing and instructive, as indeed was the common purpose of deployment, 'to see Ireland as she ought to be'.²⁹ The crucial

difference lies in the means; and here, in the specific politicisation of the ends of cultural response in terms of the people, Young Ireland, particularly through the propaganda work of their principal spokesman, Thomas Davis, attained lasting significance.

It was Lever's lot to have to contend with such opponents during his editorship. Yet, at the outset, he announced himself aware of the issues and quite prepared to be engaged on their behalf. In an 'Editor's Address', signed 'Harry Lorrequer'. Dublin, March 21, 1842', he notes, surprisingly, that the editorship 'For many a long year past... has been an object of my ambition.' The magazine, he tells his readers, 'For ten years past...has been before you, the steady defender of the Protestantism of these realms.' In view of which, 'what then can I promise?'

I can only say that, to a position surrounded by considerable difficulty, I shall bring my sole, my undivided attention - devoting myself exclusively to your interests...it is my intention while steadily maintaining the assertion of our political creed, to introduce a greater variety into the contents of each number, to procure reviews and notices of interesting foreign works...³⁰

The combination of selfless formality and, as it seems, entertaining diversity is both reminiscent of Lorrequer's 'strong will...rarely persistent in purpose' and the principal cause of Lever's failure as an editor. His desire to emphasise the ideological commitment apparently endemic to the journal at the same time as diversifying its character proved to be a contradictory outlook so out of keeping with the prevailing cultural atmosphere that it could not be resolved. It quickly proved impossible either to satisfy the requirements of Unionist ideologues or resist the strength of the developing Nation in these terms. Lever 'winced under contemptuous criticism in the "Nation" (for the young men rejected his drunken squires and riotous dragoons as types of the Irish character)',³¹

and made the additional mistake of allegedly enlisting 'a corps of third-rate English contributors'.³²

Lever's record as an editor is predictably erratic. In the 'address' above it will be noted that his sense of ideological obligation seems secondary to his sense of novel intellectual diversion. The latter led him to giving the magazine an interesting, contemporary literary note, featuring articles on Keats, Vigny and Stendhal, among others. This certainly was a new departure and appears to have caused a marked reduction in the number of antiquarian contributions. It is always difficult, in discussing Lever, to satisfactorily ascertain what should be classified as intentional and what as carelessness. Nevertheless, whatever the reason for his practical refusal to become totally embroiled in the cut and thrust of contemporary cultural politics, his sense of wanting to provide cultural stimulus through material uncontaminated by the prevailing atmosphere is by no means as blameworthy as contemporaries liked to make out. At the same time, however, the reduction in 'national' material appearing under his editorship meant a certain falling off in the quality of fiction in the magazine. (One of the results of this was to oblige Carleton to resort to the novel, with very mixed effects on his artistic development.) Lever's own contributions, collected as Nuts and Nutcrackers (1845), a series of satirical squibs, Tales of the Trains, being some chapters of railroad romance by Tilbury Tramp (1845) together with his most ramshackle novel to date, Arthur O'Leary: His Wanderings and Ponderings in Many Lands (1844), constitute in their fragmentary character, the latent anomalies and uncertainties of his position.

Lever's reactions to the duress under which the editorship placed him was two-fold and, as usual, antipathetic. On the one hand,

his social behaviour, as so often before, was escapist. If, as has been said, 'Lever, the nineteenth century Dublin tradesman's son, was always living in imagination, and trying to impose upon reality, the life of a young eighteenth century Galway squire',³³ then his most conspicuous attempts to ape such a model took place in these years. (Personally, I believe Lever to have been in pursuit of a superior model, with all due respect to the type cited: for one thing, his nature was singularly devoid of the viciousness characteristic of such an avatar.) The style in which Lever conducted his life at Templeogue House, outside the city, its lavish and genial hospitality, its cultivation of whatever pretended to wit and zest in the capital, makes comparison with Scott more appropriate.³⁴ Here Lever lived out the social apotheosis of the free-and-easy, feckless, Lorrequer style, an escapist gesture the cultural irony of which rests in his inability to sustain it, as much as in the fact that its pretensions were in any case anachronistic, being marginal and dislocated recapitulations of the Unionist heyday of Dublin in the 1780s. In this sense it fell to Lever to the opening notes of the swansong of Unionism, for not least among the results of the Famine that befell Irish society a very short time later was to render untenable any future attempts to live in accordance with such norms or expectations.

On the other hand - that is, viewing Lever's reactions to his context from an artistic standpoint - the painful lessons in cultural politics that he was being taught did have an effect. The testimony of the period's key witness that 'Charles Lever nursed a rage against O'Connell so preternatural that it overflowed into his novels',³⁵ must be counteracted by the same writer (whose own political differences with O'Connell had a more lastingly disruptive effect than any 'rage') remarking that Lever 'could not resist the

same sentiment [of nationalism]; his historical stories took a tone so national that his cautious Scotch publisher demanded if he was "repealising like the rest."³⁶ Lever was doing no such thing, but even if there is something anomalous in his having an historical novel (or, more accurately, a novel with a strong colouration of historical material) such as The O'Donoghue (1845) praised by Maria Edgeworth,³⁷ there is no doubt that Lever's work from this period onwards reflects the provocation of the times, a reflection of circumstances being of course a decidedly different thing from an identification with them.

Moreover, during the editorship, he formally kills off Harry Lorrequer as an authorial presence, relegating him to editorial duties only.³⁸ The date of this 'last confession' may be an indication of the pressures of office, the installation of his restless persona behind a desk being perhaps a sop to seriousness. Rather less than twelve months later, both mask and man had quit the office and the country, never to return permanently. Before doing so, however, and as the clearest expression yet of the opposition's impact on his writing life, he produced a brief and, relatively speaking, well organised novel on the theme of life on the land, St. Patrick's Eve.

Despite its representing a significant thematic shift in Lever's work, its utilisation of important material related to the author's experience of the 1832 cholera epidemic, and its marking the beginning of his more intimate association with the Victorian literary market place through the firm of Chapman & Hall, St. Patrick's Eve is more of a landmark in Lever's career rather than a crucial text in its own right. As a text, it was intended by Lever to be 'the opportunity of saying my mot sur l'Irlande which, whether unfounded or true, is at least sincere'.³⁹ However, it remains a sketch for

more comprehensive essays on the condition of Ireland question. It was the last work which Lever composed in Ireland, and it is a paradox entirely typical of his career that in exile he realised his most appropriate character as an Irish writer.

The biographical sources for Lever's career tend to be unspecific about the occasion and motivation for exile, and the following generalised summary gives the character of how it's treated:

Stung by criticisms that came at him like hornets from every side, in a pique with Ireland and the Irish, he committed the unpardonable sin of his fun-and-frolic philosophy by falling into ill-health and ill-humour, and resolved to leave Ireland.⁴⁰

Failing to identify with Thomas Davis's powerful synthesis of 'the Gaelic and Catholic tradition, rooted in the remotest past; the eighteenth century democratic and rationalist tradition of the United Irishmen [of 1798 fame]; and the liberal and romantic nationalism of contemporary Europe',⁴¹ and, for all his adherence to 'Protestantism - the religion of liberty and enlightenment',⁴² failing, in common with the vast majority of his Unionist contemporaries, to take mature responsibility for the temper of the times, it was left to an increasingly unhappy and demoralised Lever to realise his conclusive status as an Irish writer in exile. There, and in the work he produced abroad, he gave full expression to the socio-cultural dislocations which typified himself, the vast majority of his class, and their ideology.

2 Lever and the Condition of Ireland Question

In considering the three works which I believe to be most expressive of Lever's particular contribution to nineteenth century Irish fiction, justification for which belief will be provided below, it must be emphasised once again that the body of fiction produced

during Lever's years of exile is as uneven in its general character as any other body of work by him. Yet, as in the military novels, there is in the later works an effort to return to the reckless, artistically profligate spirit of the earlier novels, which emerges as an implicit critique of that spirit. As already indicated, one must be very wary of suggesting that any novel by Lever addresses itself to a particularised rendering of ideological awareness as such. The overall character of his output may be evaluated in terms of a tension between the rendering of such an awareness and an escape from it, a tension over which Lever is only able, or willing, to exercise severely restricted control.

The body of fiction produced in exile, therefore, contains such disparate elements as contemporary satires, for example Davenport Dunn: A Man of our Day (1859), mock-Smollett exercises such as The Dodd Family Abroad (1854), and military-cum-historical works like Maurice Tiernay, The Soldier of Fortune and Gerald Fitzgerald, 'The Chevalier'.⁴³ At the same time, however, a new orientation occurs in the work of this period, evidence of which is most obviously contained in the three works I shall be examining below. It is partly in the novelty of their concerns their significance lies, and, as in my discussion of the military novels, I should like to present some idea of the general character of these works before discussing their particular exemplification of my theme.

The novelty of The Daltons, The Martins of Cro' Martin and Luttrell of Arran, derives from the shift in emphasis discernible in Lever's work for the first time in St. Patrick's Eve. The attempt to address himself in that little novel to a depiction of Irish social conditions as such, the rather daring and certainly uncharacteristic use of a peasant character as the narrative vehicle, the use

of personal experience (depiction of a cholera epidemic) and of contemporary reformist concern (temperance), all show a very different sense of fictional material, with a corresponding, though not, in the event, radically different adjustment in artistic handling. Once having laid claim to such material, Lever, typically, neither developed a decisively strong mastery over it or entirely relinquished it. Some elaboration of it to form an analysis of Irish socio-political life since the Union may be observed in The Knight of Gwynne: A Tale of the Time of the Union (1847), The Martins of Cro' Martin ('in a sense a sequel to The Knight of Gwynne'⁴⁴) and his last novel, Lord Kilgobbin; A Tale of Ireland in our own Time (1872) - though the claim that this novel contains a portrait of 'an intelligent young Fenian'⁴⁵ is not finally borne out by the text. However, these three novels do represent an attempt to resist populist infection of the body politic.

The specific interest in recent and contemporary history, although an important aspect of Lever's career in exile due to his strenuous but inconsistent efforts to translate his undoubted journalistic ability into actual political participation on the English domestic scene,⁴⁶ is in the works mentioned more part of their thematic diffuseness than a successful realisation of the relevance of political reality to the changing character of Irish society (though, as I hope to show, The Martins of Cro' Martin is something of an exception). In effect, political reality is introduced only to be regretted. On the other hand, in the three works I've selected for discussion there is, first and foremost, a much more obvious concentration on the theme of identity and community, and in addition the fact that this central concern is subject to distinctive mediations in all

three novels links them both particularly and generally to my sense of nineteenth century Irish fiction. In the case of The Daltons the theme is approached largely from the standpoint of personal history; The Martins of Cro' Martin deals with it basically from the perspective of social history; while in Luttrell of Arran, the principal orientation derives from a racial view.

In keeping with Lever's own context during the composition of these works, there is a much greater emphasis on matters concerned with identity than on those dealing with community. That is, the emphasis on identity is aligned with both the author's own alienation from his inherited cultural context and with a problematic of landlessness shared, in different ways, by the protagonists of these three novels. This basic shift in subject matter, while related obviously to the crux of appropriate and self-sufficing form discussed above, is underpinned by different structural features. As the titles of the works broadly suggest, the central structural focus now is no longer the blithe young subaltern.

The choice of families as both the basic thematic focal point and, so to speak, the principal unit of structural cohesion creates an analogous though significantly more articulate diffusiveness to that found in the earlier works. In other words, in these three novels diffusiveness results in Lever's inclination to follow each 'road in life' (to use one of his favourite, recurring phrases throughout his period of exile) of each family's members. Had Lever concentrated on this inclination he might well have evolved an expository narrative method interestingly dependent upon analogue, comparison and proliferation rather than the rather Darwinian 'survival of the fittest' mode of narrative development to be found in his more illustrious contemporaries. (In view of this, his use of doctoring

and death suggestively departs from Dickens's, for example, while his admiration of George Eliot,⁴⁶ though it may legitimately be considered a politeness to their mutual publisher, Blackwood, may also derive from a vague sense of artistic kinship.)

Such diffusiveness, however, has the effect of testing the limits and the resources of the formal context in which it operates. The family, a preordained form of personal and social presence, an establishment through which one, being a member of it, may possess, or at least gain well-directed, meaningful access, to the world, exists as both template and definition. As such, therefore, it is characteristically under stress, in flux; externally it may be a locus of community sense, while internally it is precisely such a sense which proves completely problematical to its members. Thus, while there may be correspondences between the way in which facilitating, articulate social institutions are presented, the family is a much more fluid and open institution; its instabilities are much more concentrated and internalised.

As one might expect, one way in which Lever in exile formulates the material contained in his portrait of the family as problematic institution (and of course the fact that he is willing to see it as such, however reluctantly, is in itself an advance on his view of the army as articulate social form) is to place it in a foreign context. Members of the Dalton family are consistently exposed to the vicissitudes of the non-familial world, by virtue of internal family problems and by being in exile. The use of Europe as an escape from social responsibility by Mary Martin's uncle has fatal results on both his niece and himself. Kate O'Hara, in Luttrell of Arran, risks the subversion of her true nature by being overshadowed by the petrifying style of her mentor, the dessicated man of the world, Sir Within Wardle. In all three cases, 'natural'

(that is, unsought, inherited, generic) family attachments are seen to be travestied, disrupted, adulterated by contact with the glittering shallowness of the fashionable world.

The assault upon name and upon stably located place (upon, in effect, the possibility of identity and community interrelating) made by the representative attractions of an alternative world, is enacted in all three novels by making a vulnerable young woman a target of fashionable blandishments. This is the most obvious and most revealing change in Lever's strategy. While to some extent the young ladies in question possess a measure of the spirit of their military opposite numbers, because of their femininity and attachment to some sense of family (even if, as in Kate O'Hara's case it is primarily residual, this makes her desire for it all the more potent), such spiritedness is no longer a means to escapist self-realisation but, on the contrary, places them under duress which emanates from the social and historical antinomies which the military fiction evades. Lever's military heroes, in their behaviour, assert a sense of honour which they have never had to earn. The heroines of the works in question embody that same sense of honour by virtue of having to struggle to assert it. In this way, too, the emphasis of these later works is primarily on identity, but in such a manner as to entail consideration of its dependence on community.

The manner in question required of Lever a vocabulary of activity, and a syntax of self-realisation which, whatever their debt to features in his earlier work, are a significant adjustment in his sense of what he wanted to express. In isolating the most obvious changes in theme and approach to be found in these three later novels, I have simply outlined some of the terms he made available to himself

in articulating his new concerns. Perhaps the most important characteristic of the novels now under consideration is that they focus on a problematical sense of the reality they desire to represent. We must now examine each of the three novels (it will prove most useful to consider them in chronological order) to see how Lever, with his habitual and enduring preoccupation with form, dealt with the characterisation of his sense of problematic.

(i) The Daltons: Identity and Exile

Judging by Lever's own statements on this novel one would think that it is either an over-elaborate political thriller or a military novel. He opens his 'Author's Note' which concludes the first edition with the following:

While owing to the fictitious features of this story, and the unreality of all its incidents and actors, I cannot part with my readers without a word to those truths, stranger than any fiction, to which occasional reference has been made in these volumes; and here, once for all, I beg to declare that it is not lightly nor without abundant proof I have dared to speak of the Lombard insurrection as an organised and pre-arranged plan of Austria to crush the cause of Italian liberty, and extinguish at least for a while the hopes of Constitutional freedom in the peninsula. [XVI, xv].

As to the specific military orientation, he wrote in the preface to the 1859 edition:

If the original conception of this tale was owing to the story of an old and valued schoolfellow who took service in Austria, and rose to rank and honour there, all the rest was purely fictitious. My friend had made a deep impression on my mind by his narratives of that strange life, wherein, in the very midst of our modern civilisation, an old-world tradition still has its influence, making the army of to-day the veritable sons and descendants of those who grouped around the bivouac fires in Wallenstein's Camp. Of that more than Oriental submission — that graduated deference to military rank — that chivalrous devotion to the 'Kaiser' which enter into the soldier heart of Austria, I have been unable to reproduce any but the very faintest outlines, and yet all these were the traits which pervaded my friend's stories and gave them character and distinctiveness. [XVI, p.xiii]

Any reader unaware of these influences and orientations may well be surprised at Lever's emphasis on them. To him the novel will be Lever's first substantial attempt at a family history, and the use of contemporary political material or military reminiscences will inevitably seem not so significant in its own right, but significant because Lever uses them as the basis for rendering the definitive characteristic of his family history, namely dispossession. Moreover, the author's evidently unresolved attitude to the value of the 'purely fictitious' will strike the reader as disquieting.

Yet the material cited by Lever is important partly because of its verisimilitudinous potential, but more importantly because it lends to the merely fictitious matter the colouration of public themes. Although perhaps Lever was more interested in developing the plot out of a sense of contemporary events than in developing his characters in relation to that plot (development as such is, in an important sense, the means by which dispossession is fully demonstrated, as is made clear in the contrast between Ellen Dalton's career and her sister Kate's), the fact that the two Daltons, Kate and Frank, who are given public lives participate in the higher spheres of contemporary life without ever influencing or deriving value from it, is the most subtle expression of the quality of their dispossession. Moreover, the plot of the novel ultimately works out to be a comprehensive critique of that publicity, and a vindication of Kate's and Frank's various public failures. The restoration of their birthright, with which the novel ends, takes the additional, ancillary form of the effective reconstitution of the family, the forgiveness of the past, and offers a model of integration and integrity which the dazzling world of Europe conspicuously lacks. (That such

a massive reconciliation was of an importance not mentioned by Lever in either postscript or preface may, I think, be inferred from his decision to locate it in Inistiogue, county Kilkenny, where as a youngster he visited his cousins.)

But while ultimately asserting the importance of the family, Lever is by no means uncritical of its ostensible freedom to assess its own significance. Such an attitude contains a penetrating view of absenteeism. Even though the Daltons are absentees by default, not by choice (Peter Dalton having been deprived of his property by an intensely rational legalism, a cast of mind so thoroughly at odds with his own), their condition in Baden is one of being detached from any substantial or relieving engagement with the material world. Deprived of the responsibilities and, more painfully, of the self-confirming fabric of life on the land, they are paying the penalty of alienation which is the product of the incompetence which cost them their place and birthright. In addition, this loss is compensated for (in all cases but that of Ellen) in two opposing ways. On the one hand they have a quasi-Micawberish reliance on fortune, typified by old Peter's gambling but also revealed in Frank's eagerness for 'the bubble reputation'. On the other hand, they console themselves (again, Ellen is the exception) with their various versions of 'the old spirit of the Daltons' [XVI, 26]. These versions contain both an understandable hankering after the position they have lost and an over-compensatory sense of its grandeur. They express both a sense of family honour and integrity and a self-deceiving appreciation of the means by which such a sense is capable of underpinning present reality. Internalised possession of a basis for stable identity is out of keeping with the external possibilities of substantiating it. As a result, both self and world are in a state of dislocated appre-

hension. That which provides inner strength creates a directly proportional degree of public vulnerability. In this sense, absenteeism becomes a definitive occasion of the family institution under stress, and that stress is characterised in terms of an imbalance in the relationship between identity and community. (However much this view of absenteeism is indebted to Edgeworth's The Absentee, Lever's treatment of the theme is certainly impressive in its own right and is carried to greater lengths.)

Stoical, repressed Ellen Dalton, by existing within the structure of such an outlook while at the same time refusing to share wholeheartedly in it, draws out (by the character of her own uneven attachment) some of the implications which are necessarily hidden from the others. By resolutely declining to develop Ellen as an actress in the plot, by delimiting her strictly as a recipient of others' experiences, Lever lends her a certain iconographical status: she is stable, passive, enduring. (Her particular story is the sole substantiation of the author's claim that in this novel, 'I have attempted...the quiet homely narrative style of German romance-writers'.⁴⁸) Her immunity from 'the very vaguest conception of what the world was like' [XVI, 192], her having 'associated all her thoughts with those whose life is labour' (ibid), is intended to substantiate her self-confessed view of herself as 'but the image of our fallen fortunes' [XVI, 193], while at the same time conveying a resilience and serene acceptance which Kate's and Frank's deficiency in engenders vanity and subversive worldliness.

Ellen exists as a criterion incorporating an adequacy of affections and attachments, not, as in the case of the other Daltons, an exaggeration of them. But her integrity is obliged to coexist

with (and indeed may be the result of) being disabled. While Lever clearly approves of her sense of values, its sphere of operation remains private, restricted, and in her uncle Stephen's view unamenable to translation into worldly terms, whose negotiability he (rather than Frank or Kate) represents:

Nelly's epistle was a complete enigma to him — she was evidently unprotected, and yet not selfish — she was in the very humblest circumstances, and never asked for assistance — she was feelingly alive to every sorrow of her brother and sister, and had not one thought for her own calamities. What could all this mean? — was it any new phase or form of supplication, or was it really that there did exist one in the world whose poverty was above wealth, and whose simple nature was more exalted than rank or station? [XVII, 368-9].

As these observations imply, Ellen's integrity resides in her willingness to exist within her limitations. This view is neatly, if somewhat whimsically, brought out by her efforts to earn the family's keep by carving models, the perfection and scale of which are expressive of her own status. (The seriousness of making toys is an effectively ironic anticipation of the 'toying' to which both Kate and Frank prove susceptible later on.)

As her uncle's observations also suggest, Ellen's integrity is based on her emotional self-possession and its optimum expression is in terms of an ethic of service, an ethic also shared by her brother and sister but temporarily betrayed and distorted by them in the manner in which they avail of opportunities to implement it. Lever demonstrates the quality of Ellen's embodiment of the ethic in an extreme fashion by associating her with Hans the dwarf. Such an attachment contains an unfortunate echo of her implicit concern with scale. Awkward and unsatisfactory as this is, however, Lever's intention seems to be a challenging depiction of Ellen's emotional openness. Indeed, as suggested by her ultimate domicile with Hans

in his native Tyrol - whose every feature 'were realisations of many a girlish hope, when she wished her father to seek out some secluded village, and pass a life of obscure but united labour' [XVII, 306] - the dwarf is, in his own right, a replication of her qualities:

It is true that Hans saw the world only through the medium of his own calling, and that not a very exalted one; but still there went through all the narrowness of his views a tone of kindliness - a hearty spirit of benevolence, that made his simplicity at times rise into something *almost akin to wisdom* [XVI, 21]

Insignificant as Hans may be in the overall scheme of things, he is the subject of his own reality, and is appreciated as such by the family, whose own significance may not be described in those terms. Despite the argument of this novel concerning a struggle between substance and form (embodied in the careers of Frank and Kate) it is probably too much to claim that Ellen's integrity is underlined by her attachment to what is substantial in Hans. Nevertheless, even if his own remarks on such a struggle are offset by the reservation about 'narrowness' just quoted, the terms in which he criticises Frank's military aspirations are notable for their expression of a sense of that struggle:

"I am talking of soldiers, such as the world has ever seen them...What are they?...but toys that never last, whether he who plays with them be child or kaiser..." [XVI, 19-20].

If Ellen is the repository of domestic virtue, and by extension of adopting, or perhaps deflecting, the significance of absenteeism for her own particular family in favour of attaining an enshrinement of the presentness to which her values entitled her (a presence finally ratified in terms of the generic requirements of a biedermeier painting), Frank embodies the polar opposite case of being in the world. This contrast, as well as providing a certain

dynamic comparison of considerations regarding substance and form in relation to social roles (a dynamism which Lever's proliferating, accretional narrative method almost completely devitalises), also has an effect on the overall solution to the family's difficulties. Ellen is not reintegrated to the family circle at the end, presumably because to do so would be to undermine, make temporary and thus relativise the importance of her Tyrolean enclave. The qualities represented by her landfall are those which will form the basis of the repossession of the Dalton birthright. Thus, her status as a figurehead is confirmed.

Frank Dalton, however, has none of his sister's quietism. This is obviously manifested in his naive (because undisciplined) militarism. But it is shown in other ways too. The loss of the land is felt more acutely by him than by any other member of the family. Even as a child,

To see this old house of his fathers, to behold
with his own eyes the seat of their once greatness,
became the passion of the boy's heart. Never did
the Bedouin of the Desert long after Mecca with
more heart-straining desire. [XVI, 39]

In one sense, of course, the desire to live unthinkingly in glory reflected is a dangerous strain of psychic absenteeism; the temptation to live in the terms of the past, in its modes of control and possession, while nomadically involved in a present devoid of the past's properties, must be resisted. Frank fails to do so, as his military career shows, and his failure costs him his self-respect and almost his life.

At the same time, however, his childish desire to pay homage to the old homestead is an important display of spirit. (And of course the protection of that spirit from contamination is the subject of the plot, or phrased in terms already introduced, the

preservation of substance from the duress of inappropriate form.) Although too young to be aware of it, Frank's visit to the now dilapidated family home is all the proof he needs that he is a true Dalton. Fittingly, therefore, he is rewarded for his exploit by observing something which ultimately enables him to reclaim his heritage. While there may be inklings of a critique of the military form in some of the ways in which Frank's career is portrayed, this must be offset by his being the spirited instrument through whose energies the family's position is finally rectified. Interestingly, too, the nocturnal burial which the young Frank observes remains his own private secret, undivulged even to Ellen, who alone is told the rest of the escapade. Lever remarks that Frank's silence on the matter is due to 'some strange love of mystery' [XVI, 42], but this, I think, sells it short. What Frank observes is undoubtedly mysterious, but it is, in effect, an external representation of the generally unreasonable and opaque justification of absenteeism, an enactment of moral dilapidation whose physical counterpart is the state of the property, and whose psychological counterpart is the destructive insecurity which animates much of Frank's behaviour in uniform. The murder symbolises the distortion of absenteeism, all the more so since its perpetration is an alleged cause of the condition and its discovery a relief from it.

Frank's indiscipline in uniform is the result of his exaggerated, imbalanced need for a negotiable identity. Related to greatness, in the form of the family's psychological bequest (embodied properly in the austere composure of his uncle Stephen), he allows himself to be compromised into presenting himself in its terms, which he hasn't either the material substance or the self-possession to live up to. Time and again he runs foul of the very code he so ardently seeks to vindicate him. His energies so persistently

mislead him as to oblige him, finally, to recognise that his role is not a performer's and that his actions should confirm meaning. On numerous occasions, 'Frank blushed deeply at the allusion to his supposed wealth, but had not the courage to refute it' [XVII, 169], or had a similarly upsetting response to the contradictions which comprise the reality of his condition.

Frank's failure in uniform is ultimately more significant than Ellen's successful withdrawal. In his failure we see the full measure of his inexperience, and this permits consideration of what meaningful experience would be for him. Such, at any rate, seems an important implication of uncle Stephen's revaluation of his nephew's character:

He believed that by subjecting Frank to all the hard rubs which once had been his own fate, he was securing the boy's future success; forgetting the while how widely different were their two natures, and that the affections which are moulded by habits of family association are very unlike the temperament of one unfriended and unaided, seeking his fortune with no other guidance than a bold heart and a strong will. [XVII, 372].

And as a result of this insight, uncle Stephen assists Frank in the realisation of the means whereby his affections will be satisfied, travelling to Inistioque to legitimate the family's claim to their own. If 'cadet von Dalton' offers a misleadingly imprecise configuration of Frank's identity, it does so by betraying, or subverting, the decisive structure within which his true self may flourish, and as in the case of Edgeworth and Carleton, the final arbiter of identity is a character's emotional nature. Frank's shortcomings turn out to be the means of realigning fundamental relationships. His fate is to coexist with his heritage, and this is presented as being superior to controlling the destiny of Empire. As such, therefore, it is similar in character to, though more expressive in effect than,

Ellen's selfless idyll. The experience of exile, for Frank, seems to be a necessary rite de passage on the road to the materialisation of true value. Militarism offers a model form which the Dalton spirit may legitimately aspire to assume. But what is important is not the successful assumption as such, but the access it provides to the question of significant form.

Although uncle Stephen is an imposing representative of a successful military career, for Frank achievement in these terms gives credence only to the myth of experience. All the colour, dash, turbulence and jeopardy, despite being at the service of the machinations of Lever's somewhat insecurely conspiratorial sense of the historical process, are evanescent, devoid of the longed-for propensity to ratify which is offered as the principle of integrated coexistence in the world. The restoration of the house is in effect a cancellation of certain aspects of personal and social history (a much more obviously mythical enactment than that of identifying with historical processes, though here intended to be the perfect reaction to it). The liberation, or subjugation, of Lombardy is so ensnared with plot and counterplot that it is not susceptible to comprehension, merely to manipulation. In this sense, the ultimate outcome of Frank's expense of spirit in the service of contemporary historical necessity proves to be both the most serious attack on his assumed form of identity and the basis of a recognition that identity, so conceived, is misaligned. Accused of being a spy, he is an innocent, and must restore the structure which will confirm him as such. He must necessarily deface the images which substantiate the myth of coherence in militaristic form. Only through this unwitting struggle can he attain a position from which formally to

possess the proper locus of his affections, a position reestablishing the interdependence of identity and community.

Frank then is the most exposed of the Daltons to pride and self-promotion, an exposure which has its roots in the unexamined 'evil' [XVI, 26] of family hubris. A mistaken sense of family is a mistaken sense of the world, and both Kate and Frank bear this out in their antithetical but complementary ways. For all the vicissitudes of Frank's 'road in life' it is a reasonably straight one, and its ultimate direction is vouchsafed to the reader at least by Frank's possession of the secret information.

The most serious case of the problematic of identity brought about by exile is Kate Dalton's. Hers is the most complex career, and even in geographical terms, the longest road (from Baden to Inistiogue, via Florence, Vienna and St. Petersburg!). As a woman, she is not allowed to possess the character of her brother's spirit, but neither is she maimed like her sister. Her road is equidistant from theirs, as indeed is her basic attitude to the family:

As for Kate, she felt it a compensation for present poverty to know that they were of gentle blood, and that if fortune, at some distant future, would deal kindly by them, to think that they should not obtrude themselves like upstarts on the world, but resume, as it were, the place that was long their own.
[XVI, 26]

Her career in the world, ironically provided by the Onslows, present owners of the Dalton patrimony (an unnatural access to the world, in contrast to Frank's, which has the temporarily misapprehended certainty of blood relationship to underwrite it), is more successful than her brother's. Yet it is undertaken with an air of passivity not dissimilar to that embodied by Ellen. Kate doesn't enter the Onslow world, she doesn't release herself from the family circle (the circle which has an unproductive stasis, in specific contrast

to the interminable, convoluted activity of an elected 'road in life'), for a particular purpose. Her purpose is to participate. In Florence she discovers,

Life assumed features of delight and pleasure she had never conceived possible before. There was an interest imparted to everything, since in everything she had her share. [XVI, 252]

Dependent as she is on the amorphous concept of 'fortune' - which contains none of the inbuilt, generic substance of Ellen's domesticity (however stolid and sentimental) or Frank's pursuit of la gloire (however excitable and naive) - Kate represents the synthesis of the struggle between substance and form in the novel. Her hopes that 'fortune' will favour herself and the family, that it will, somehow or other (again we note the chronic Dalton refusal to think, the chronic Lever disability to permit his characters consciousness), ratify her perception of the family, facilitate her induction to the world of those whom fortune has ostensibly blessed. Kate's being blessed in a similar way turns out to be corrupting and potentially destructive. Her very success has a cruelty, constraint and jeopardy attached to it which make it the ultimate expression of exile and displacement, imposing distortions and betrayals undreamt of when simply exiled within the family circle. Fittingly, therefore, it is Kate's success which, in effect, causes her father's death; the weakness of her position, disguised by the material substance that accrues to it, exposes the blindness of his.

The unnaturalness of the Cnslow world - a world which that particularly fractured and finally ruined family typify by their style - is masked by the superficial triumph of form, as Kate finds out:

Kate Dalton, whose whole nature had been simplicity and frankness itself, was gradually brought to assume a character with every change of toilet...her mind was only fettered with topics of dress and toilet. [XVI, 251].

And we don't have far to look to appreciate the corrosively attenuating effects of such concerns on identity:

Oh! most insidious of all poisons is that of egotism, which lulls the conscience by the soft flattery we whisper to ourselves, making us to believe that we are such as the world affects to think us. [XVI, 252].

The coarsening of the self which irresistibly results from exposure to refinement, to mere social gloss, is the signature of the Onslow world, every member of which is, in a representative sense, a denatured absentee. Against this world all Kate can advance is family pride, but circumstances are such that this, for the time being, cannot be the basis of an alternative, more substantial frame of socio-ethical reference.

The tissue of sub-plots which is both symptomatic of, and instrumental in, Kate's denaturing have as their common theme emotional subversion and betrayal. It may be difficult to justify the byzantine intricacies of the interrelationship of Norwood, Nina and the Abbé D'Esmonde in terms of efficient artistic organisation, but its convoluted coils do depict the emotional jungle which Kate has to confront. And by substantiating Kate's position in emotional terms, Lever emphasises the concern with personal identity in the manner characteristic of nineteenth century Irish fiction. But Lever goes farther than simply reproducing a set of familiar lineaments. He also provides a politico-cultural dimension to the intrigues of the sub-plot, inflating its potential for subversion and emphasising the conspiratorial associations of plot. The emphasis and the inflation is too good to be true. Yet, by introducing such considerations, Lever does succeed in strengthening the counter-claims of Nelly's outlook. And if Kate's new-found egotism is as damaging as we're led to believe, then the main area of damage is her

emotional self, as the involvement with Medchekoff is intended to show.

The politico-cultural aspects of these considerations are made available by Kate's career, but not embodied by her. Their embodiment is the nefarious Abbé D'Esmond, the formal coördinator and, as it were, central defender, of conspiracy as personal style. An officer in the Empire of the Spirit, which is how Lever implicitly sees the Church of Rome (since its agents control and exploit the character of selfhood denoted by emotional life), he occupies a position equal and opposite to that of uncle Stephen. Not only are he and the Abbé political enemies, they also represent directly conflicting ways of life. Uncle Stephen's disciplined generosity is the polar opposite to the Abbé's unscrupulous manipulation. Kate begins to find her way when she is able to replace the latter with the former, though predictably this occurs not as a result of choice, primarily, but circumstantial good fortune. Just as uncle Stephen represents formal, totally adequate possession of all that is best in the Dalton outlook, Abbé D'Esmonde embodies all that a frustration of those values entails. The Catholicism that he serves is amoral in its worldliness and militant, to the point of agitated obsession, in its pursuit of subversion.

Lever intended that the contemporary political opinion informing this view of the Church be taken seriously, and for its own sake, that is, without reference to its fictional possibilities. In the 'author's note' to the first edition of the novel, he writes:

It is scarcely necessary that I should say that the Abbé D'Esmonde is not taken from any living model. I merely intended to embody in the character the views and opinions which I know to be entertained on certain political questions by some men of his cloth

at Rome, and that the policy of the Pontifical Court adheres to the fortunes of Despotic Government is a fact little likely to be denied in the face of events and happening before our eyes. [XVI, xvi]

But there is clearly more to the Abbé than this.

In effect, the Abbé D'Esmonde, by his power, ambition and his fidelity to the vision of the world entrusted to him, provides a structure and a rationale for the fragmentary Onslow world. This is shown by his talented manipulation of his pawns' weaknesses, by the ironic treatment of the alleged stability which Kate's mistress, Lady Hester Onslow, attains on converting to Rome, and by his temporarily successful ratification of Kate's false persona in that world. By sheer force of will, he forces himself to demonstrate that his perception of the world resolves, by exploiting, antinomies of substance and form. (In this sense he is at once a more dangerous and more challenging parasite than Albert Jekyll, who represents the normative parasitism which Lever satirically indicates is endemic to the absentee way of life).

But the very success of the Abbé's unnatural fabrication of coherence and purpose - in effect, the very fact of his exploitative consciousness - exacts an extreme psychic toll in exactly the same area as that which his machinations undermine in his victims: identity. The 'one terrible suspicion...that there is a flaw in his just title' [XVII, 119] to the position he now occupies is precisely implicated, inextricably bound up, in the Dalton's history. That suspicion, which has the same force and basis as Frank's secret information (and the same haunting effect). Bizarre as the Abbé's plotting is, it reveals the depths of disorder and alienation which the Daltons unwittingly skirt in living out the claims of absenteeism. And, typically, the malevolent energies which prompt the Abbé derive

in the first instance from his having no natural structure ('my family, of which I knew nothing'; [XVII, 120]). In fact, as the dénouement makes clear, the unresolved mystery which beclouds the Abbé's sense of himself, pertains directly to origins, patrimony and family structure. It is in this general sense, activated by the localised details of the plot, that the Abbé can truly confess, 'Again and again have I told you, that towards these Daltons I bear a kind of instinctive aversion' [XVII, 452].

Because of the enmity's 'instinctive' basis, its provenance remains obscure to D'Esmonde, and as such is symptomatic of his alienation from an inner self. Conspicuously unlike the Daltons, his emotional life has atrophied. It therefore remains for circumstance to outflank the plotter. The deposition of circumstantial evidence during the trial finally exposes the enemy for the renegade ingrate that he is, and as a result of Frank's detailed, material contribution, the Abbé simply has no further standing in the world, a cancellation all the more pointed for taking place on his home ground. Nothing remains but for the Daltons to come into their own again, a consolidating feature of which is Kate's reunification with solid George Onslow. Such a consummation has obvious ideological import, since it makes the restoration of the house an obviously Anglo-Irish affair. In addition, the timely return of Onslow from Imperial duty in India (whither he had repaired from the impossible situation in his family during its Florence sojourn), is perhaps Lever's final vindication of the values of service more centrally embodied in that Imperial disciplinarian, and effective head of the family, uncle Stephen.

Despite the concluding emphasis on the novel's one obvious model of stable and honourable structure, the Dalton family's accession

to their rightful inheritance is implicitly the creation of a higher quality model. This is because of its double-sided community significance: not only is the family reconstituted as a community (not least a community of the affections) but, by extension, the community at large is enriched. That particular extension is not dwelt upon by Lever, but it surely must be entailed by the lessons in unselfishness which each member of the family has been required to learn. The reinvigoration of the Dalton spirit, represented by uncle Stephen's sentimental wallow amidst the scenes of his boyhood, is perhaps an anticipation of the future. But with the emphasis so obviously on the identity side of the thematic equation, Lever may be forgiven for not being explicit about the shape of the restored community. Nevertheless, the reactionary, or more accurately perhaps, regressive character of what uncle Stephen's sense of belonging entails, however heartwarming, is not particularly promising. Undoubtedly, the purgation of the past is a powerful contribution to overcoming absenteeism, but the present contains tensions of its own. Some sense of what these are, and their implications, come to light in the next novel to be examined.

(ii) The Martins of Cro' Martin: Identity and the Family

Although the suggestion that The Daltons is 'possibly his most ambitious book',⁴⁹ must be qualified by an awareness of its inordinate range, in both circumstantial and thematic terms (which reveal once again Lever's retention of his early preference for breadth instead of - or, perhaps more accurately, as the equivalent of - depth), the novel's limitations are not of a kind to elicit agreement with the remark that, 'At times, as in The Martins of Cro' Martin (1847 [sic]), he seems to be fumbling towards a subject which might engage his feelings, but never with complete success.'⁵⁰

On the contrary, the subject of absenteeism, its repercussions and remedy, was so plainly present in Lever's mind, for cultural as well as biographical reasons, that his difficulty in coping with it may just as well be caused by the completeness and inescapability of his embodying it.

Due to the characteristic unevenness of his oeuvre, however, it cannot be assumed that he intended to develop an articulated purchase of the subject. If, as I shall argue, The Martins of Cro' Martin represents a development of the concerns presented in The Daltons, this may be more revealing than Lever himself knew. At the same time, however, the shift in emphasis - to families, to misgivings about the tenability of organic landed community and even more serious ones about the vanities of a world devoid of and opposed to such a norm of social organisation, to articulate objections to the nascent political order which appeared at the same time as his own sense of social maturity - is more marked in 'The Martins' than in The Daltons, while specifically related to that seen in the latter. If The Daltons ultimately represents a projection of the desirability of restoring the house and the family, The Martins attempts to depict the house and family in situ ('house' and 'family' being understood here to be, in Lever's eyes, categories of value). The gulf between substance and form, which throughout The Daltons is revealed in the counterproductivity of action (exemplified by the careers of Kate and Frank) in an alien world, is finally bridged by the conclusively meaningful activity of restoration. It is only at the end of the novel that activity denotes meaning, that it becomes a specific of coherence. In The Martins, however, this questioning of activity as meaning (or, less obscurely, the questioning of what kind of activity is meaningful) is more sharply

focussed since, ostensibly, the value which is presumed to inhere in 'family' in The Daltons is already formally possessed by the Martin family: they are 'of' a particular place, and are not, in the first instance, condemned to wander 'roads in life.' As the title of the Martins' story tells us, name and place are one: the consummation devoutly wished for in The Daltons is here the point of departure. Thus Lever, in this novel, attempts a theme which had been absent from nineteenth century Irish fiction since Castle Rackrent (or, more arguably, Ennui); he attempts not a down-to-earth description of life on the land, but a representation of the criteria which underpin and undermine the cultural and political status of the landed family - in other words, he focusses on the generic considerations of the material, an approach which is most readily seen here (as elsewhere) in the presentation of characters as socio-cultural types.

Even if it is thought that 'Lever's later work has value today only because of his sympathy with a landlord class that had been splendid in prodigality, and went down into picturesque ruin',⁵¹ this is not a negligible source of sympathy, nor, judging by the prevailing tone of The Martins did Lever think of it flippantly. While writing it he spoke hopefully of 'its more reflective characters', since 'I owe I wrote it with due thought'.⁵² The latter claim is supplemented by remarks in both the 'Apology for a Preface' to the original edition and the 1872 preface, by the fact that 'of the terrible epidemic which devastated Ireland, there was much for which I drew on my own experiences' [XXI, xvii], by his 'purely fictitious' heroine's resemblance to an actual, historical Mary Martin, 'many traits of whose affection for the people and efforts for their wellbeing might be supposed to have been my original' (ibid),⁵³

and by his admission that The Martins contains a response of sorts to criticism of the 'Bohemian' [XXI, xiii] cosmopolitanism of some of its immediate predecessors, including The Daltons:

Exactly in the same way...that one hurries away from the life of a city and its dissipations, to breathe the fresh air and taste the delicious quiet of the country, did I turn from the scenes of splendour, from the crush of wealth, and the conflict of emotion, to that Green Island, where so many of my sympathies were intertwined, and where the great problem of human happiness was on its trial on issues that differed wonderfully little from those that were being tried in gilded salons, and by people whose names were blazoned in history. [XXI, xiv]

(The fact that Lever ignores, in this statement of motive, the representation of absenteeism in The Martins of Cro' Martin, and the representation of its abolition in The Daltons, supports my suggestion earlier that Lever was not fully aware of the possibility that the later novel reflects on issues arising out of the earlier. He merely saw the two as contrasting. Even if, as might well be argued, the absenteeism material is a function of 'the fatal tendency I have to digression' [XXI, xviii], that in itself is an expression both of the unfixedness of the condition and of the difficulty Lever experienced in coördinating a stable perspective on it.)

It is in view of the latter difficulty that The Martins achieves its particular significance. In writing a novel about Irish society, Lever acknowledges his desire to project the possibility of a coördinated whole, using the historical fact that in the early 1830s, 'the old ties that...bound the humble to the rich man, and which were hallowed by reciprocal acts of good will and benevolence, were being loosened' [XXI, xiv]:

I have not the shadow of a pretext to be thought didactic, but I did believe that if I recalled in fiction some of the traits which once had bound up the relations of rich and poor, and given to our social system many of the characteristics of the family, I should be reviving pleasant memories if not doing something more.

To this end I sketched the character of Mary Martin. By making the opening of my story date from the time of the Relief Bill, I intended to picture the state of the country at one of the most memorable eras in its history, and when an act of the legislature assumed to redress inequalities, compose differences, and allay jealousies of centuries' growth, and make of two widely differing races - one contented people. [XXI, xv-xvi]

The personal regret of the citizen that social harmony did not result from the passage of the Relief Act of 1829 has been allowed to overwhelm any pretension to objectivity that Lever the author might hope to possess. Due to his inability to detach himself, by the stratagems of artistic awareness, from the issue of his own cultural identity, this novel remains an unsuccessful account of the failure of a social ethic. The history of the Martins' decline obtains to ultimate cultural significance because the medium which conveys it is crippled, in its own way, by exactly the same deficiencies as those afflicting the family.

It is painfully revealing that Lever himself was partially aware of his failure, as he admits in his 'Apology for a Preface' to the first edition:

The various objects which I had hoped and promised myself to present to my readers have been displayed faintly, feebly, or not at all. The picture of a new social condition that I desired to develop, I have barely sketched - the great political change worked on a whole people, merely glanced at. Perhaps my plan included intentions not perfectly compatible with fiction - perhaps the inability lay more with myself - mayhap both causes have had their share in the failure. But so it is that now, my task completed, I grieve to see how little opportunity I have had of dwelling on the great problem which first engaged me in the social working of the Emancipation Bill of '29. [XXI, xix-xx]

Painful as such an acknowledgement is, it contains (as does the preceding quote, the sentiments of which should be borne in mind during the course of the following remarks) a number of important observations as well as a number of disingenuous and unexamined emphases.

In the first place, the suggestion that the Relief Act was a benevolent parliamentary gesture discounts the unique agitation which, at the very least, influenced its implementation. Lever's description of that particular historical moment takes its perspective from a sense of superstructure and the formal usages in which it articulates its status. As an approach to the significance of the campaign for, and realisation of, Emancipation, Lever's is formally inadequate.

Secondly, if 'pleasant memories' are indeed intended to be antidotes to widespread loosening of ties, they must be memories profoundly charged with a nostalgia for social forms more coherent than those vouchsafed to contemporaries. Rather than 'pleasant memories', Lever seems to be invoking the myth of a golden age. This myth is to be found also in the works of Edgeworth and Carleton, and in the case of all three writers is their attenuated version of pastoral (attenuated, since it remains throughout a desideratum to be returned to, not a substantially realised context expressive of cultural inheritance or literary convention). From an historical standpoint, however, such as that from which Lever wants to regard it, there seems little doubt that such a golden age of relationships on the land ever existed in Ireland or anywhere else in Europe from the emergence of feudalism onwards. (The existence of a brief period of political hegemony among certain elements of the proprietor class in the 1780s and '90s in the event marked the end of an historical period, not its viability.) The inadequacy of an historical standpoint which is not grounded in a comprehensive possession of the social reality which it presumes to evaluate is simply another example of the apparently inescapable tendency towards imbalance and disproportion contained in, and expressed by,

Lever's outlook. The fictional repercussions of such a tendency may be readily seen in the problems revealed by his fiction regarding the well-balanced timing of events.

A function of the erratic behaviour of Lever's sense of timing is revealed in a third unexamined emphasis in the material quoted, namely his reference to a sense of 'the great problem'. The difference between recognising a problem and approaching it in a problematic spirit is something which escaped Lever. His disinclination to assert positively whether the novel's deficiencies are due to his own capacities or to some intractable quality of the material is in itself an expression of a refusal to adopt a problematic attitude to his task. Instead, as the burden of his remarks suggest, he approached his theme in a solution-seeking spirit, a demeanour which only succeeds in blurring any latent distinction between 'the mind that suffers and the art that creates'. Such a blurring leaves its signature in the text in precisely that area of fictional practice where clarity is of the essence, namely the area where action is in itself a mode of articulation. The structural over-dependence on coincidence and concealment, presented in terms of the thrust of fortune and the counterthrust of subversion (both in The Martins specifically as well as in Lever's work generally), prevents the representation of action as a conclusive mode of registering meaningful presence; it denotes the degree of complicity which exists between the novel's theme of failure and the formal occasion in which that theme is enshrined.

Much of the significance of The Martins derives from Lever's implicit acknowledgement of his theme, failure (revealed through his sense of momentous legislation which yielded no discernible

social amelioration), and his resistance to it, embodied in the character of Mary Martin. In textual terms, this antinomy is expressed in a variety of ways.

One example of it is provided by the ostensible digression concerning the painter, Simmy Crow. The family's amenability to the charade of historicity which the artist is composing (a heavily ironic charade in view of the picture's theme of abdication) is undercut by its inability to supply a model for the most striking, most composed figure in the scene. But it is not due to the absence of such a model that the picture remains unfinished, but rather due to the head of the household's being incapacitated. Simmy, whose sense of form is derivative and his use of it repetitive, never succeeds in accomplishing his task, but the failure is not simply his. The genially satirical tone used to describe his inability to consolidate content, and his ensuing failure to fully meet the formal requirements of the genre, caution us against viewing his position as a miniature of the family's. Rather it is a subsidiary symptom of it. The family's inability unreservedly to satisfy the requirements of historical portraiture relates thematically to the fear of anachronism which informs Lever's attitude to his material. By means of this inability, our sense of evasions and remotenesses of a more crucial variety is strengthened. The atmosphere of psychic dilapidation, boredom and isolation which pervades the wastefully magnificent apartments of the family seat is the result of a self-regarding, self-repressive charade of significance, the stale aftermath of a disinclination to imbue the formal conditions of possession with the meaningful content of responsible activity. Like the painter's magniloquent and incomplete collection of gesture and posture, the grand façades behind which Godfrey Martin and Lady

Dorothea hide express a failure to either implement or ratify the social example inherent in the cultural iconography of their status.

The failure to marry form and content, which receives further substantiation in the imbalanced relationship between Godfrey and Dorothea, has the twin effect of making them remote from the reality of life on the land and, ultimately, absentees. The combination of Godfrey's weakness and Dorothea's pretensions is a recipe for unproductive relationships in every sphere. The former's underdeveloped sense of identity, deriving from resistance to the obligations of his heritage, is further stifled by the latter's overdeveloped sense of mere self-importance. For all Godfrey's being 'disgusted...with the world' [XXI, 36], he retains a sufficient degree of self-respect to resist a political smear of being 'a barbarous old remnant of feudal oppression' [XXI, 65]. Dorothea, in contrast, appears merely to possess a snob's evaluation of circumstances and heritage. While admitting to have 'read' of the better aspects of the Irish character, she prefers to base her attitudes on the inevitable narrowness of her own experiences which, 'limited to the rags and restlessness of a semi-barbarous people' [XXI, 130], are deemed unworthy of her who has "lived elsewhere...I have acquired habits...in behalf of twenty things that Irish civilisation sees no need of" (ibid).

In Dorothea's view, the antidote to imbalance is abdication, a move which exposes Mary to far abler manipulators of the form and content problem than Simmy Crow could ever be, namely the opportunist Scanlan and the exploitative Merl, through whose exploits, the cycle of deprivation, both psychic and material, comes round full circle once more on Mary. (Though, of course, it must be remembered, she is finally eclipsed by the character of her own integrity.)

The apparent redundancy of the Simmy Crow material provides illustrative access to the motifs of incompleteness and displacement which denote the final, half-hearted and socially misaligned efforts of the Martins to retain proprietorial- and self- possession of their heritage as a family. After the departure of Mary's guardians, the fate of the family as arbiters and coördinators is reposed in those who are either too vulnerable or too distracted to redeem it. The inheritors, Mary and her cousin Harry, are both, in different ways, undermined by a common social enemy: opportunism. This socio-cultural style's insidious formlessness is represented by the bohemianism of continental metropolitan life (as might be expected from having read The Daltons) and, on the home front, by the tawdry pseudo-democratisation of political response by the local O'Connellite faction (whose ideological inspiration is in any case continental, as we learn through familiarisation with the absentee Martins' bitterly ironic choice of landfall). Yet - to return to the relevance of Simmy Crow - as well as giving us the access already mentioned, his failed painting contains its version of those antinomies which bedevil its context. The naive honorifics which 'the great "Historical"' [XXI, 59] was intended to exemplify never obtain to formal self-possession. But this is a matter of regret to the artist. In other words, the tribute to status which Simmy undertook was, in his admittedly limited view, an authentic expression of the family's grandeur. Simmy's attitude to the picture is ironically at odds with a reader's view of it, but in that attitude - I ever is careful that 'none can reproach him [Simmy] for a mean subserviency' [XXI, 64] - is an implicit desire that grandeur, the heroic style, the drama and panoply of eminence still hold good. The attitude is responsible for the anachronistic inaptness of the

picture, and for resisting the potential deficiencies it contains. The attitude commissions an irony which, by its nature, it cannot absorb.

Simmy's impoverished, 'nobody' status ensures that he may only illustrate the foregoing observations. It is not within his range to develop them. But Lever develops them in the character of Valentine Repton, who is at once the novel's most obvious anachronism and the family's one remaining link with a period when their status could substantiate the attributes which Simmy naively strives to lend it. Repton, a lawyer (that is, an arbiter of agreed and established forms of negotiable social presence), is both a representative of 'A fine, high-hearted, manly class' [XXI, 168] and a failure:

...a man whose abilities might have won for him the very highest distinctions, but who, partly through indolence, and partly through a sturdy desire to be independent of all party, had all his life rejected every offer of advancement, and had seen his juniors pass on to the highest ranks of the profession, while he still wore his stuff-gown, and rose to address the Court from the outer benches. [XXI, 169]

His intimacy and involvement with Godfrey Martin's affairs strengthens and clarifies the latter's claim to implicit, though disembodied, significance.

Crow's illustrative function in the novel, or rather the idea of illustrative function embodied by Crow, can be seen, in Repton, to modulate into emblematic function. An example of how such a development takes place can be seen from the fact that both serve similar functions, but in different realms of significance. They both serve as links between disparate areas of the narrative, both annotate and describe events without ever initiating them, and both embody the unexamined desire to serve what the reader recognises to be a no longer viable sense of the family's importance. The

difference between them lies in the spheres of influence they are required to occupy, and these spheres are characterised not simply in terms of social differentiation but, as a result of such terms, by means of ideological awareness. What I have referred to above as Simmy Crow 's naive honorifics are given a more resonant emphasis in Repton's political sophistication. Though the painter depicts, and gives us access to the meaning of, Martin's abdication, Repton articulates that meaning in its most decisive and realistic terms, by challenging his friend Martin with its local, immediate and inevitable socio-political repercussions.

Yet the ultimate expression of the challenge, in a letter to his dying friend (which, predictably, is intercepted by the politically insensitive, socially self-aggrandising, Dorothea) is couched in sentiments so obviously reactionary as to reveal Repton's own alienation from the political realities whose nature he perceives so knowledgeably:

Come home, then, at once, but come alone.
Come back resolved to see and act for yourself.
There is a lingering spark of the old feudalism
yet left in the people. Try and kindle it up
once more into the old healthful glow of love to the
landlord. [XXII, 275]

Despite his familiarity with local political activity, whose unsavoury antics lurch in and out of the novel's foreground, Repton is unable to associate himself with either of the three new men who denote the various latent tendencies of the embryonic, formless new politics. Neither Joe Nelligan, Jack Massingbred or Magennis offer Repton a basis for regarding the flux of the new political diversity as a potentially enriching state of affairs. The neglect of Joe Nelligan is particularly remiss, since that brilliant and austere young man seems to be cast in a mould not dissimilar from

that of the old lawyer himself, not to mention the fact that Joe is a lawyer - that is less inclined to opportunism and subversion, as are Massingbred and Magennis, respectively; more inclined to uphold a continuity of the forms and proprieties. (It should be noted, however, that Lever, far from exempting the legal profession from the pessimistic dualism which pervades The Martins, sees it as representing a particularly crucial version of it, typified in the coupling of theatricality of courtroom antagonism with after-hours camaraderie: 'even the least ingenious of men will ultimately discover how much principle is sapped, and how much truthfulness of character is sacrificed in this continual struggle between fiction and reality' [XXII, 156] - or between form and substance, or between the contending levels of meaning which derive from role and personality. Repton, revealingly, is at the centre of the instance exemplifying the observation.)

For all Repton's acquaintance with the contemporary situation, both in its local manifestations as well as its international character, he can only at best watch it take its course. Ultimately, he is unable to create a structure of support around Mary Martin, without which her efforts, for all their nobility of intent and sincerity of execution, become the last and most extreme expression of a social ideal whose practical application, in any case, was always bound to be problematical. Despite his forensic talents, his social decorum, his ideological awareness and his impressive objectivity, Repton is borne along by events entirely beyond his control. He is confined to the role of articulate witness, the definition of which is that it is necessarily devoid of action. His one material contribution to the fate of the Martins is the one which marks his retirement. The occasion is, however, a hollow one,

being in effect a purely formal confirmation of the true, legal allocation of the family's property. The formal hollowness of this procedure is confirmed, rather than offset (as seems to be the intention), by the rhetorical embellishments of the price - Mary's death - at which the truth is purchased. The idiom of this closing speech is as unrealistic and well-meant - or revealingly sublimatory - as that of Simmy Crow's painting. To regard Mary's career as 'devoting grace that might have adorned a court to shed happiness in a cabin' [XXII, 392] is as expressive of Repton's own sociopolitical impasse as it is of the heroine's tragedy.

The nature of Repton's adequacy, and the condition of ultimately passive recognition which expresses it, reveals a sharpened, though finally inconclusive, sense of the antinomies contained in Lever's overall relationship to his theme. In Repton it takes the form of acknowledgement of change together with a temperamental and cultural resistance to what the intellect perceives. The lawyer exposes himself to an enactment of his own attenuated, limited sociopolitical relevance (without being fully conscious of so doing). Yet the meaning of this exposure derives from his encounters with newly-emergent political energies, which with full consciousness he resists. He may succeed in keeping the form of the family's heritage intact, but its substance has deteriorated beyond redemption. This fatal discrepancy denotes the political character of the family's abdication. It is Repton's role to articulate this, but in doing so successfully, he himself becomes a talisman of the failure to which he provides access, being powerless to reverse it.

Though Lever himself does not consistently sustain the iconographical properties of his characters, it is tempting and not irrelevant to continue to conduct our argument about this novel in

terms of them. If Simmy Crow is, arguably, a caricature, and Valentine Repton a study in profile, it is possible to see Mary as full-length portrait. Such a description is intended to distinguish Mary's position and bearing in the novel, as well as to suggest that with regard to her Lever had a different type of perspective than that from which the other characters are regarded. Despite the somewhat attenuated applicability of iconographical terms, Mary Martin remains a most distinctive character not only in this novel but, broadly speaking, in the Lever canon overall, as may be seen from his own conception of her:

I have endeavoured to picture one whose own nature, deeply imbued with the traits of country, could best appreciate the feelings of the people, and more readily deal with sentiments to which her own heart was no stranger. [XXI, xx-xxi].

Not only is Mary the missing centre of Simmy Crow's picture, but she is a depiction of the nature and problematic character of that centrality. She is the embodiment of that cöordinating and conserving energy which ideally informs a viable relationship between identity and community, and transmits that energy and its ethic in a manner which is explicitly at odds with both the decorative, statuesque posturing of the painter's models and the correspondingly anachronistic realm of perception inhabited by Repton. Unlike the other characters in the novel, who basically reside within the orbit of mutually exclusive camps (denoted by impotent remoteness from the realities of life on the land, culminating in inner hollowness, exemplified by Godfrey Martin; or by opportunistic proximity to the main issue of the day, culminating in aggravated ideological combat, exemplified by Magennis), Mary relies on the promptings of her own nature, and her sense of its basic reality permits her to keep faith with the basic reality of the people's condition. By virtue of these

terms, she represents the most crucial and explicit version of failure and resistance to it, the significance of such a representation deriving from the fact that she is an enactment of the novel's antinomies, not merely an access route to them.

Utter dependence on the reality of her own energy and motives is clearly seen as both a source of strength and a symptom of the social and personal orphanage which, early and late in her life, afflicts Mary. And even if the reality attributed to Mary's sense of identity is an authorial contrivance (owing much, in its presumption of unqualified purity of action, to the code of honour vested in Lever's military heroes), here Lever carefully and justifiably allows circumstantial influences to evince a reality characterised in such terms. Thus, Mary's devotion to the people's cause is both the projection of a desideratum and a representation of profound vulnerability. She embodies, in action, the ideal of an interrelationship between identity and community, and the massive degree of stress to which that ideal is prone.

To a large extent, the fact that she so conspicuously lacks either personal or structural support represents the ultimate challenge to her commitment. While her uncle was in residence, however ineffectually, he acted as a source of continuity and context - as a cultural accreditation - for those values which are materialised in Mary's activities. Once he succumbs to the reality of his impotence, and passively opts for absenteeism, Mary has only her own singularity to act upon. The fatal abdication of a mentor, no matter how much of a figurehead he was in reality, produces a deficiency in addition to all the others with which Mary has to cope. Her nature remains uncontaminated to the end, but it can only attempt to offset the the disestablishment of material structure. Its reality is of a

different order from that required for structural restoration.

The destruction of the family as a material reality is ordered by Lady Dorothea, and is in an immediate sense a function of her crass, self-aggrandising, metropolitan ambitions. In a more general sense, however, disestablishment can be seen as a function of the emotional nullity expressive of the relationship between her ladyship and Mary's guardian. The infertile and evasive nature of this relationship both results from and consolidates the fact that the partners concerned are denatured. As such, they are entirely at odds with Mary's character (particularly in the realm of vital, unselfish activity). The abuse of material substance, which is traditionally symptomatic of the moral blight of absenteeism, is only one of the most keenly-felt impoverishments which Mary is obliged to resist. The other, contained within and bound up with material considerations, is emotional deprivation.

It is impossible to disentangle the complex and unexamined interdependence of emotional and material reality. However, Mary's position is such that she is doubly deprived, being neither the emotional or material legatee of the family. (As a result of such deprivation, it is perhaps fitting to regard her as a portrait of what such an inheritor should be.) Due to material deprivation, Mary cannot sustain the structure of the family's significance; all she can do is sustain the spirit of it, which by any standards (most notably, of course, Lever's) is not a negligible ambition. A large implication of material deprivation and consequent structural disenfranchisement, though one which tantalisingly remains an implication, is Mary's political homelessness. The loss of the family's structural significance is, arguably, more than a material

loss; it is an ideological catastrophe which, in the case of Repton, can be used to articulate the novel's antinomies. Repton, for all his authentic impersonation of antiquated mannerisms, is still sufficiently au fait with the contemporary political atmosphere to advise, 'It is too late to try the feudal system in the year of our Lord 1829, Miss Martin.' [XXI, 180] - which, incidentally, locates his subsequent appeal to the dying Godfrey Martin (quoted above) as an expression of the irreconcilable ideological position Repton himself occupies, though again, in view of still later events, already mentioned, Lever fails to develop adequately this position.

Given the inherent anachronism of Repton, and the radical character of her putative half-sister (the whilom Kate Henderson, whom Mary never knows as such: another symptom of dispossession), our heroine is deprived of ideological resource, and of a conception of the future which is the latent attraction of such a possession. Once again, this deprivation throws her back on her own resources, but now gives it a specifically socio-political colouration in that without a negotiable conception of the future, she is consigned to total immersion in the present, a status broadly reminiscent of that occupied by the military heroes. The difference between the intellectually combative, ideologically aware Kate and her sister, is explicitly realised by the latter on her return from Paris and the ultimately incompatible Lady Dorothea, and is given pointed emphasis by being articulated in view of a common, futureless heritage of desolate landscape and fraught people, the latter represented by that archetypal peasant retainer, Cathy Broon, in whom, predictably, the secret of both girls' paternity is reposed.

Of the wild visionary ambitions which once had stirred her heart, there remained nothing but disappointments. She had but passed the threshold of life to find all dreary and desolate; but perhaps the most painful feeling of the

moment was the fact that now pressed conviction on her, and told that in the humble career of such a one as Mary Martin there lay a nobler heroism and a higher devotion than in the most soaring path of political ambition, and that all the theorising as to popular rights made but a sorry figure beside the actual benefits conferred by one true-hearted lover of her kind. "She is right, and I am wrong!" muttered she to herself. [XXII, 307].

The ironies of this extract are manifold and significant. First of all, it is to Kate, not Mary that another chance is given. She is restored to her father, united with her lover, is permitted to set out for the New World and 'the tranquil existence they had longed for' [XXII, 403]. Moreover, Mary's 'native chivalry' and 'her old Celtic blood' [XXII, 303], while undoubtedly essential ingredients of her integrity (at least in conceptual terms) are not in any sense proof against the world she has inherited, whose principal characteristic is ideologically-induced immunity from integrity. The upshot of such a realisation, borne out by Repton's closing speech (quoted above), is that Mary Martin's death is the culminating expression of her worth. This conclusion is possibly intended by Lever to be a vindication of the novel's theme of failure. By her death, Mary achieves a perfect and, so to speak, incorruptible embodiment of her selflessness. But such a conclusion seems to me to bring the ultimate expression of the novel's antinomies; it reveals what is intended to be a magnificent tribute to integrity conveyed in terms denoting its untenability, immateriality, and eclipse. Mary's death coincides with the final rectification of the heritage question and the family's (as well as the novelist's) conclusive abdication.

Nevertheless, it is important to account for the terms of Mary's death. Unsupported by anything other than her own innate resources of sympathy, unselfishness and a sense of inner relatedness

with the community, she brings their energy to bear on a social situation which is ridding itself of a presumed amenability to these strengths. The opportunism, pretentiousness and, latterly, the disease which are, in their various and collective ways symptomatic of the unstable, transitional and ideologically assertive condition of the community are crystalised, for narrative purposes, in one abiding deficiency, namely, a loss of innerness. The crystallisation occurs in the relationship between Magennis and Joan Landy, a relationship which is emotionally abusive and deforming, and to the rectification of which Mary lends all her emotional strengths. Conceived of in such terms, it can be seen that Mary, acting out of her personal possession of integrity (here, as throughout, thought of as inwardness, emotional rectitude, 'natural'), attempts to allay the threat to its possession by others brought about by a change in socio-political affiliation.

Indeed, Mary, by a consummate and definitive display of spirit succeeds in creating the preconditions of rectification, confirmed by Magennis's readiness to suddenly lend her his political support. But this gesture comes too late to make good Mary's expense of spirit on behalf of the people for whose destiny he presumes to be an activist and spokesman. It is Joan, whose fidelity to superannuated modes of native decorum has been marked throughout, who strikes the appropriately piteous emotional note - "sure it's my own self brought grief and sorry under this roof" [XXII, 386] - for all that Kate Henderson attempts to palliate such an expression of feeling.

Magennis's own deeply obscured residue of traditional honour has been revealed by his ultimate refusal to implement his political aims by assisting the rapacious Merl. The militant O'Connellites'

behaviour on that occasion evoked Mary's grateful recognition that "they are not as others call them - cold-hearted and treacherous, craven in their hour of trial, and cruel in the day of their vengeance! I knew them better!" [XXII,212]. Perhaps this reassurance motivates her efforts to reunite Magennis and Joan, whose benighted state of social awareness makes them legitimate objects of exemplary heroics. Yet for all the perilous readjustments required to prompt the heart to rest in the right place - genuinely meant and undertaken with devastating generosity - where is the place itself? In embodying the ideal spirit of the requirements governing a relationship between identity and community, Mary is obliged to demonstrate the unavailability of such a relationship's reality. By attempting, in admittedly projective terms, a realisation of the desired stability which his predecessors could only theoretically advance, Lever achieved the failure which is the deficient, unlimned centre of his own career. That failure, like Mary Martin's ultimate unreality, is both expressive and inarticulate, significant and insufficient, conclusive and void. From the unhappy coexistence of such antinomies comes the meaning of life on the land, a meaning that can neither be upheld or annulled.

(iii) Luttrell of Arran: Identity and Race

In The Martins Lever provided the most far-ranging account of his reading of life on the land. Yet his own awareness of what he had achieved is typically incomplete, as can be seen from his apologetic prefatory remarks, as well as from other evidence. Two pieces of supplementary evidence regarding his sense of the novel's inconclusiveness may be mentioned.

The first concerns the attitude of the novel's dedicatee, Mortimer O'Sullivan, a rabidly Unionist Protestant divine, whose career and activities date from the days of Caesar Ctway, The

Christian Examiner, and the New Reformation, that curious cultural moment which paralleled, was complementary to, and at the same time an inversion of the contemporary quest for cultural self-awareness which characterised the Anglo-Irish intervention in national life during the period covered by this thesis. Lever stayed with O'Sullivan on one of his infrequent visits to Ireland from Italy and reported:

O'[Sullivan] has read the Martins but I scarcely think he is overpleased with it - he certainly prefers the FitzG. story and wishes I had gone on with it instead.⁵⁴

(The reference is to Gerald FitzGerald 'The Chevalier'.) In other words Lever's friend and host considered the innocuous military vein superior to the shift in emphasis represented by The Martins. Obviously, one mustn't set too much store by the divine's literary taste. At the same time, however, the terms of Lever's dedication attempt to offset the ideological differences between himself and O'Sullivan by invoking the greater significance of sentiment (an attitude which the novel in the case substantiates to the full):

If I have not asked your permission to dedicate this volume to you, it is because I would not involve you in the responsibility of any opinions even so light a production may contain, nor seek to cover by a great name the sentiments and views of a very humble one.

I cannot, however, deny myself the pleasure of inscribing to you a book to which I have given much thought and labour - a testimony of the deep and sincere affection of one who has no higher pride than in the honour of your friendship. [XXI]

The point at issue is not the extent or seriousness of an ideological split between two friends (which could not have occurred at the time of the dedication, and in any event was probably never adequately articulated). Rather it is that Lever, despite numerous painful realisations concerning the emergent character of an Ireland in which he could no longer reside, a place which could not assimilate

his cultural style (as he later regretted: 'There was assuredly a time in which, if Protestants could only have been assured that their religion would be respected, they would have joined O'Connell in Repeal.'⁵⁵), still remained faithful to that unassimilable dimension. Such fidelity was no doubt inevitable, and is perhaps the signature of Lever's own personal embodiment of an interrelationship between identity and community. Nevertheless, the continuing affiliation and identification with the intellectual ethic of, for example, O'Sullivan, suggests that Lever failed either to accept the terms in which The Martins convincingly presents a structure of failure or to analyse the reasons for the acknowledged failure of the novel as a whole. Rather than learn from his work, Lever declines the intellectual (and ideological) independence thereby conferred. It is in the context of such an omission that Luttrell of Arran should be approached.

The second piece of evidence is a general substantiation of the above, namely the further repetition of the failure theme. These later novels possess a superficial diversity, and do not represent Lever's complete output from 1856 to the date of his death. Nevertheless, whether in Luttrell of Arran, The Bramleighs of Bishop's Folly (1868), or Lord Kilgobbin (1872) the theme is recurrently and intractably present. Indeed, the very prominence given to specifically socio-political and cultural material of Irish interest both marks Lever's efforts to rework the theme and his failure to articulate it adequately. In other words, the evident impossibility of developing the perceptions of The Martins continued to haunt him. And while it is not the case that from The Martins, Lever's career went downhill all the way (the success of the Cornelius C'Dowd sketches in Blackwood's during the 1860s provides evidence to the contrary),

his career-long inability to break free of his inherited ideological moorings seems in the final years to have exacted in personal terms the same toll they had always demanded artistically.

His ideological allegiance, which he had spent a rather large amount of time in the 1850s attempting to turn to public advantage for himself, culminated in a consular appointment. This he viewed as confirming his isolation, rather than his fitness for public office. Of his Tory benefactors he wrote: 'For thirty years I have done them service in novels and other ways, and they have given me what an under butler might hesitate over accepting.'⁵⁶ His judgement of his own work, admittedly never dependable, now became so slack that works as diverse as Tony Butler, Sir Brook Fossbrooke and 'What I did in Belgrade by Bob Considine'⁵⁷ are referred to in equal terms.⁵⁸ Such judgements have to be seen in the context of admissions like, 'I ought never to have taken to the class of writing that I did',⁵⁹ 'I am always hoping that each book I write will be my last',⁶⁰ and 'no man ever did less with his weapons than I have.'⁶¹ Even given the limited nature of the source material concerning Lever's closing years,⁶² the spectacle of his personal decline, when he came to recognise the full implications of exile (a context which provided the basis for his most substantial work, and found it its most characteristic and significant theme - failure), is a most unhappy, and affectingly expressive one.

Yet for all that, and despite the repetition of that characteristic theme, Lever continued to renegotiate his familiar socio-cultural terrain, continued to locate a basis for an inter-relationship between identity and community. Even if the contexts and the degree of narrative manipulation discernible in Luttrell of

Arran are familiar, there is a bleakness and bathos in them which make this novel distinctive from its predecessors, while its central preoccupation relates it to, and places it on the same level of artistic achievement as, its predecessors. Even if the racial emphasis merely indicates an importation of contemporary, pseudo-organicist race theories,⁶³ and places it on the same artistic footing as the intellectually unassimilated use of 'feudalism' in The Martins, there is an attempt to depict (though, typically, without examining) the source of phrases concerning 'Celtic blood' and 'one people' which occur in The Martins. Additionally, by centring the bulk of the action in Kate O'Hara, Lever is able to concentrate on his own sense of social archetypes as embodied by the people, and to present the most conspicuously deliberate concern with 'nature' (meaning fundamentally humanising properties) which his work contains. The fact that such a concern is located in and exemplified by a native is an interesting anticipation of one of the main ideological structures of the cultural orientation promoted by the generation following Lever's (the Yeats generation).

Thus, while in Luttrell of Arran Lever may be legitimately accused of failing artistically or analytically, to improve on the perceptions arrived at,^m or informing, The Martins, those perceptions are seen through, so to speak, a different intellectual range-meter and from a different perspective. Just as, within his novels, Lever's narrative procedures seem to entail proliferation much more than development, so in the canon of his work certain themes remain constant while the manner of representing them is variable in the extreme.

Rather than the textual occasions, or the plot, cogently revealing Lever's theme in Luttrell of Arran, it is the organisation

of those elements - or more accurately, those characters - whom the snares of plot beset that illuminates the handling of the theme. In other words, Lever is more interested in the nature of his characters, both in the sense of what they inwardly possess and in their socio-cultural configuration, than he is in the possibility of their being ratified by particular schemes of action. Not only is there a consistent inadequacy in the various schemes of action (those concerning the Vyners, Sir Within Wardle and Herodotus Dodge) due to their being seemingly borrowed from earlier Lever novels, but the localised activities contained in them are predominantly nullifying and destructive, involving murder, sequestration, shipwreck and the like. It is from the nature of the characters, their inner resource which despite the inevitable jeopardies endemic to worldly experience remains essentially uncontaminated, that meaning derives, not from action. (In this perception we see the reality of Lever in exile, a reality which proposes the self, not the world, as an epistemological norm.) The world is a terrain discernible only by the misfortunes it engenders, which the self must encounter but not be either seduced by (as in the case of Sir Within Wardle) or repelled from (as John Luttrell allowed to happen). In resisting both these likelihoods - Sir Within and Luttrell senior constitute, in their being given equal and opposite status, the splendours and miseries of an earlier generation: Kate O'Hara becomes the central character because, by virtue of the vulnerability of being a native, she is called upon to withstand the oppressive and would-be formative influences of both - one is thrown back on what one is, as opposed to toppling over into what the world is conspiring to make of one. The sole available support for self-reliance provided by the world is the evidently arbitrary oscillation of fortune (a view already

offered in The Daltons), which may in its own inscrutable manner decide to favour the brave - as in the fortuitous meeting between Kate and Harry Luttrell at Liverpool. Plot, then, in Luttrell of Arran, contains material which is more explicitly subversive of its participants' inner substance, and less adequate a means of materialising their value, than has been the case in earlier Lever novels. In view of this, it is necessary to consider what constitutes 'inner substance' rather than any presumption that its proprietors make something of it.

As ironically befits a novel concerned with 'nature' and the comparatively marginal relevance of action, it opens with a death, through which occurrence we are introduced to the prevailing tenor of the work and its abiding involvement (in both a structural and textual sense) with orphanage, aftermath, withdrawal and severance. Such concerns are located in the central characters' claims on our attention, and by this means are differentiated from the minor characters, whose claims are based on their misguided possession and implementation of specific schemes of action (characters such as O'Rorke, Ladarelle and Herodotus Dodge), the net result of which, in compositional terms, is that plot as such consists of a tissue of sub-plots.

The opening, however, has a further important function, in that it introduces us to a more fundamentally important feature, upon which the novel's principle of characterisation, its principle of revealing the nature of the characters, is conceived. This feature may be termed bifurcation. Not only is the death of John Luttrell's wife a particularised occasion of deficiency and loss, prophetically illustrative of worldly misfortune, but it provides

access to a representation of inward loss and disablement embodied by Luttrell not merely in his role as widower but in the very character he has assumed in relation to the world at large. The antinomies which were depicted by illustrative participants in the family's situation in The Martins use, in Luttrell of Arran, the conscious properties of the central characters themselves, though each of them embody their own version of them. In other words, the bifurcated nature of John and Harry Luttrell, Kate C'Hara and Sir Within Wardle, is reproduced by the bifocal view Lever presents of them and is replicated in the largely irreconcilable tensions of their socio-cultural status.

John Luttrell is the impotent central exemplar of internalised antinomies, a much more adequate realisation of the 'absent centre' idea found in The Martins (though at least implicitly present in the conception of Peter Dalton). The cancellation of his marriage is, on the one hand, the cancellation of a normative social form facilitating relationship with the people, while, on the other hand, bringing to the fore the terms which caused the failure of a consolidated material realisation of that relationship. His lapsed political energies, and their replacement by antiquarianism (which it is possible to read as a critique of the cultural impetus created by the Protestant intelligentsia in the early days of the Dublin University Magazine), is both evasive and substantive. His nature is emotionally atrophied as a result of the curse which traditionally afflicts the attempted harmonisation of peasant and proprietor, reflecting qualities of the unassimilable and irrational in the past; and this atrophy is manifested in the loveless relationship he has with Harry, his son and heir, which consigns the latter to an

existence of freebooting, asocial adventuring (an implicit critique, perhaps, of a different Harry in another age), reflecting a formless and illogical future. The present which John Luttrell inhabits is defined and secured by its impoverishment, substantiated by the unexamined inflexibility and obduracy of a proud heritage. Luttrell's nature is, as it were, coextensive with the iconographical devices which represent the name he bears. We see the family colours on a 'half-black, half-white ensign' [XXIX, 157], and its crest 'a heart rent in two, with the motto La Lutte Réelle, a heraldic version of the name' [XXIX, 205].

A heritage thus characterised, combined with and related to a curse imposed on one obvious means of counteracting it, might well diminish any man's appetite for la lutte, réelle or otherwise. Yet, whatever the weight of private misfortune and public misrepresentation, the sense is strongly conveyed that Luttrell does not desire to engage with the responsibilities of his heritage. He admits that '"One of the reasons of my retirement to this lonely spot was the security I possessed in the midst of my own wild islanders against demands not always urged with moderation"' [XXIX, 190]. Yet, when one of the inevitable repercussions of that wildness presents itself, in the Peter Malone affair, Luttrell evades it, firstly by proudly refusing to encounter it, and secondly, by stating that a decision to assist necessitates 'a new banishment' [XXX, 117]. Thus, not only are there the tawdry and oppressive emblems and shibboleths of the past, but there is a present psychic enslavement to them. This is manifested both in the hollowness of the a-communal life which Luttrell proudly, though irrationally defends (a misprision of consciousness in keeping with his rejection in early life of a sense of obligation to contemporary realpolitik),

and in the emotional petrification exhibited in relation to his hapless, though spirited, son. The overall effect of such a combination of omissions and deficiencies is the impossibility of a future. On learning of Harry's supposed death, Luttrell both perceives the cost of his pride and succumbs to it. The combination of elements which Georgina Vyner sees in the Luttrells, 'Half worldly, half-romantic' is not so important as the fact that even this usually unreliable witness recognises them to be irreconcilable: 'and one never knew which side was uppermost' [XXX, 248] - perhaps inherently so, but certainly in the manner of her former lover's possession of them.

But even if 'the pride of race is very strong' (ibid) in Harry, it is not he, the titular inheritor, who is capable of accepting responsibility for them. He too, as a Luttrell, has been bequeathed a heritage which, in terms of its latent capacity to provide for an interrelationship between identity and community, to regularise an equilibrium between status and obligation, is barren. It is Kate who ultimately confronts him with this impasse with her reported denunciation of her own 'sham position...sham name...sham fortune' [XXX, 330], her barbed, provocative questions:

Do you imagine that it is only the well born and the noble who have pride? Do you fancy that we poor creatures of the soil do not resent in our hearts the haughty contempt by which you separate your lot from ours? Do you believe it is in human nature to concede a superiority which is to extend not to mere modes of life and enjoyment, to power, and place, and influence, but to feelings, to sentiments, to affections? [XXX, 306]

Kate can only ask such questions because in the course of the novel she has earned the right to, has encountered contexts where the neglect of such considerations has been disenableingly significant.

By virtue of running the socio-cultural gamut of the, by now, conventionalised world of Lever's fiction, Kate at once coördinates the bifocal approach and overrides its objective correlatives.

She survives the translation from mud cabin to grand salon, she survives the worst that the disorientation of exile and the poverty of home imposes, her nature (denoted by the strength of her affections) confronts and assimilates the problematic of heritage. Even though some of her experiences lead her to conclude that, 'There are changes of condition that seem to rend one's very identity' [XXIX, 286], she ultimately retains, both in principle and practice, the sentiment that 'we belong to one people' [XXX, 292]. The important feature of all Kate's experiences is that they fail to make a decisive difference to her character. In other words, there is something in her that will not be subverted or corrupted, and indeed due to the fact that her experiences lead her to depend increasingly on this inner strength, she becomes somewhat inflexibly resistant to localized communal orientation. This may be seen in her willingness to accompany her grandfather, the convicted murderer, to imprisonment in Australia. Her sense of emotional solidarity is such that she rejects the obligations of the Luttrell heritage and the opportunity it provides for her to assume the exemplifying role of, in Harry's words, 'daughter of the people' [XXX, 272]. Fortunately, though in unhappy circumstances, she is released from her obligation to Peter Malone (the implication being perhaps that his unconstructive social style, like Luttrell's, is dying out, or at least will, significantly, be replaced by Kate's).

To some extent it is obviously misleading to speak of Kate's experiences as failures. In the hands of Sir Within Wardle she is subjected to an extensive process of cultural relocation

and certainly falls for the style in which the process is transmitted. Yet, even if "Mademoiselle has forbidden all my legends" [XXIX, 239], Kate has by no means forgotten them. Acquiring a patina of sophistication, new learning and new manners is a challenge to which she responds pleasureably and eagerly. The failure is not Kate's, when it does occur, but that of the code to which she has given herself so freely. We can see in Sir Within the moral deficiencies of the metropolitan sophisticate's ethic, but the terms of its inadequacy are given a conclusive reality not in him but - by an interpolation deliberately reminiscent of the means by which Luttrell's inadequacy was illustrated - in the future he vouchsafes. Sir Within's state of emotional dessication is succeeded by his nephew's emotional corruption, the comprehensive character of which is shown by its necessarily conspiratorial dimension, personified by the Irish republican ideologue, O'Rorke. Kate is culpably misrepresented in their eyes, and because the conspirators can only see her as a potential recipient of property they offend against her nature, requiring for their own egotistical purposes to curtail the freedom that is its keynote. In her recollections of this period, Kate is quite explicit as to the meaning it contained:

She abhorred the équivoque of her life, but could not overcome it. She owned frankly that she had brought herself to believe that the prize of wealth was worth every sacrifice; that heart, and affection, and feeling were all cheap in comparison with boundless affluence. [XXX, 286]

In contrast, the effect of her return (or perhaps one should say, restoration) to Arran is described in the admission, "I was real at last" [XXX, 287]. The last phrase of that statement is revealing, since presumably the reality of Arran has convincingly supplanted that of a peasant childhood and a sophisticated education. But, in view of this feeling of personal reality (whose terms are

interchangeable with those of a negotiable and articulated identity), it must be remembered that the reality of her status owes much to her assumption of the Luttrell name.

The change of name, and the supplementary (though not insignificant, thematically speaking) acquisition of titular blood relationship to John Luttrell, is, during its negotiation, a revealing illustration of the fact that Kate's experiences and background, up to this point, have made her a divided person, belonging neither to her childhood world or to the world which has attempted to erase its cultural mannerisms. She proves, alternately, to be resistant to the offer of a proud name, and over-desirous of accepting it. This difficulty is resolved by her accenting that the character of her status on the island should be viewed in problematical terms: "I am going to try if I shall not like the real conflict better than the mock combat", she says [XXX, 103], punning on 'the heraldic version of the name'.

The real combat is not to share her patron's seclusion, much less the defensiveness which is its ethic. Reality is relatedness to the people, an attempted invigoration of communal possibilities by means of material and institutional amelioration of their lot. In other words, it is important to Lever's demonstration of the satisfying connection between identity and community that Kate not adopt a political or ideological posture, but that she make a contribution which represents the fund of sentiment which is the linchpin of her inner strength. Thus, she institutes schools and hospitals, establishments which implicitly denote the values of remedy and guidance, which if availed of (and what community would reject them?) vouchsafe the idea of a future.

Yet, in keeping with the rest of Kate's exploits, it is not

so much the success or sufficiency of her intervention in the community which receives attention; rather, it is the recurring sense of unwholeness inherent in the world at large, and in all its various facets, which provides a basis for evaluating Kate's accomplishment in 'combat'. This can be seen from the fact that the Peter Malone affair occupies so much more of our attention than Kate's constructive social activities. Clearly, in view of its disruptive yet curiously consolidating effect on our heroine, the key instance of unwholeness is the murder sub-plot. And in its turn, it is more a function of the native 'wildness' than it is of a structured sense of Peter Malone's social reality (though the specific aggravation and unsympathetic social reordering which produced the murder is presumably intended to be seen in explicit contrast to the restorative quality of Kate's effects). In other words, the murder is a function of those conditions to which the only response is articulated in terms of an unregenerated racial trait, a locus of inner energy the optimum form of which is the reality of Kate's constructive sympathies. Peter Malone's blind attack is, in effect, equal and opposite to the evasions of Luttrell and their particular provenance in the unreconstructed vestiges of his heritage. It is while asserting her solidarity with Peter Malone (Kate's one blood relation) that she tells Harry of the central feature of recent Luttrell history and its contemporary obligation:

Three generations of them married peasants to teach their proud hearts humility. Go practise the lesson your fathers have brought so dearly; it will be better than to repent it. [XXX, 303]

Despite differences of circumstances and training, Harry and Kate are the inheritors of an identical racial strain. Harry remarks, "They were a wild, fierce, proud set, all these of my

mother's family, with plenty of traditions amongst them" [XXX, 272], while Kate informs him that the Luttrells are "a proud race who never minded what might bechance their heads, though they took precious care of their hearts!" [XXX, 285]. In both cases, the basis for identity is the same, indomitable inner strength, yet in neither case did that strength succeed in doing more than defend its own psychological terrain, the extent of which was demarcated by the limits of personal and inherited pride. The inflexible character of this dual, or mutual, heritage is something which both Harry and Kate have to recognise and overcome, and ^{they} only succeed in doing so when neither is willing to tolerate the impasse to which it has led them. Once this state of awareness has been shared, the novel ends.

Such awareness, however, derives from inner, emotional necessity, not from a sense of social obligation. In Lever's terms, both generally speaking and with regard to those set forth here, this basis for harmony is fundamentally and significantly more true and more essential than, for example, any form of political adjustment. Identity is mediated in terms of the strength with which place, name and utility are sought, and the locating of these self-ratifying outlets is community, an undeveloped and essentially innocent zone the reconstruction and amelioration of which is at once a guarantee and a definition of the identity's integrity.

By locating his theme in a racial context, Lever was presumably attempting to reproduce a level of concern uncontaminated by political or contemporary social vicissitudes. But it is precisely the generalising tendency governing his choice of ambit which exposes his inability to construct an argument. The elimination of all material pertaining to the real-life socio-political cockpit

leads one to assume that Lever was attempting a more abstract, less relativised treatment of the condition of Ireland question. As one of his biographers reports:

Luttrell of Arran...was not receiving a very good press. 'I do not believe Luttrell will do,' the author complained to a friend, 'and my conviction is that the disfavour that attaches to Ireland, from Parliament down to Punch, acts injuriously on all who try to invest her scenes with interest or endow her people with other qualities than are mentioned in the police court.'⁶⁴

However, race in Lever's handling of it is a blend of mystique and historical determinants, in effect a concept composed of two antipathetic epistemological norms. Just as the central characters themselves are, for the most part, confused and (it seems) deracinated, by the question of what purchase on meaning their racial heritage bequeaths, so Lever's own concept of race does not itself seem securely anchored in one stable framework of meaning. The same problematic of commitment which bifurcates and reveals the nature of his characters may be seen in the irresolute and unresolved disposition of the author towards his intentions. And while we can sympathise with the spirit of the work and the ideally reconciling material form which is intended to derive from it, we can only regret that author and characters alike are finally more interesting as victims of what they can't adequately possess than as fully-engaged, intellectually challenging possessors of the ideal they strive for.

The failure of Luttrell of Arran is primarily due to intellectual flaccidity, which is all the more obvious for Lever's attempts to counteract its effects by a concentrated emphasis on the power of sentiment. As such, the failure may be seen as an expression of the general problem of consciousness and its enabling

resources which is one of the most characteristic features of Lever's output. Yet such a general failure must not disguise the enormous compulsion for meaning which lies behind it, the urgency of which provides at least a cultural, if not an artistic, legitimation for the projected but typically unintegrated vision of a valid and viable relationship between identity and community.

3 Charles Lever and the Nineteenth Century Irish Novel

With Lever's death in 1872, the Irish novel came to the end of its first, pre-conscious phase. In 1878, Standish O'Grady published the first of his volumes on ancient Irish history and saga: the age of Yeats, which in the work of its eponymous hero did so much to revalue and give a new cultural location to the whole of the Anglo-Irish literary and cultural heritage, and which may be seen, in particular, to be a revision and critique of important areas of the preceding phase's interests, was just around the corner.

Lever's significance, fitting in view of his consistent awareness and inconsistent working out of failure, is in the fact of his being a terminal case. Not only is this true from the standpoint of literary history, it also holds good for the development of his oeuvre and his career. The interrelated significance shared by these areas may be examined in turn.

In his oeuvre Lever's later works arrived at positions which are implicitly critical of those found in his earlier ones. For example, The Daltons expresses grave misgivings about militarism, the bubble reputation, the vanities of the world, and the notion that historical experience is a means of realising personal value. Although it would be misleading to say that these doubts only enter Lever's work in this novel, The Daltons is the first substantial effort to structure a novel around them. As such then, their

prominence and character can be seen as a sharp rebuke to some of the suppositions underlying the military novels.

While the Napoleonic era can hardly be regarded as a golden age, its presence in the military novels denotes an age of artistic innocence, of conceptual naiveté or indifference, to a degree which in effect dehistoricised its representation, as well as effectively depoliticising the standpoint of the author depicting it. In The Martins, history and politics are crucially to the fore, but now treated with an awareness that former omissions, however desirable, are no longer possible. The appeal for a re-establishment of the supposed stability of a 'feudal' order is conclusively turned down by the irresistible rise of the tide of contemporary events. The myth of a golden, ostensibly non-eventful age is regrettably re-mediated. The reality of that dream, signified by the urgency of its attractions, is dispelled and not replaced by a reality which might be more materially adequate. For all her spirited, high-principled adventurism, Mary Martin is unable either to derive meaning from her activities or confer it upon them.

Lever's reluctance to abandon his concern with projecting norms of stabilisation and socio-cultural harmony may be seen in Luttrell of Arran. His decision to focus that concern in the career of a peasant girl is one of the more explicit reversals of a former disposition. In his early works there is a pervasive uncertainty as to what to make of the peasantry. It might be argued that in view of their erratic dependence on, or relationship with, chaotic circumstances and feckless employers, they represent the ultimately gratuitous purposelessness of their contexts. At any rate, they are further removed from considerations of status which dart in and out of the military novels, the fact that such considerations are treated

in this way being an indication that none of the characters are closely, much less deliberately, involved with them. In 'Luttrell', however, it is precisely the question of status which besets the treatment of the native, not in a trivial sense, but, in Lever's view, in the sense of a profound and inscrutable mystique, that of race and blood.

The main drift of the preoccupations found in the later novels may not constitute a decisive reversal of earlier attitudes. In all likelihood, both in detail and in broad outline, there exists an uneven set of relationships and divergences between earlier and later work, which, as argued throughout, is typical of the tension between unresolved and inarticulate textual contrivances and the understandable but inadequate characters they finally obtain to, that of the projected solution. Moreover, if Lever's works contain elements of a critique of earlier efforts, it must be remembered that the critique is implicit. Its covert and undeveloped character is an illuminating result of the projective impetus. The imbalance between characters and their world, between activity and significance, between stable form and fluid content, reveals both the epistemological substance of Lever's most ambitious and concerted fictional efforts and the fact that he failed to take full artistic responsibility for it. In writing about a world which Maria Edgeworth said she could not address herself to, Lever conclusively demonstrates its unamenability by failing to transcend it. His inability to adopt a mode of realisation (a variety of realism) adequate simply to the transmission of his material, is consistently, throughout a wide variety of textual occasions, both a personal and a cultural failure.

Yet from the standpoint of socio-cultural history, and

particularly from the standpoint of the literary history which, in nineteenth century Ireland, formally underpins it, failure on such a persistent scale is in its own right expressive and conforms to the overall fate of the period's cultural activity. Whether from an ideological, or a narrower literary point of view, nineteenth century cultural activity (that is in the period, broadly speaking, from 1800 to 1880) produced a symptomatology, which in its inability to recognise itself as such, gave its expressive quality a relative, localised force, and denominated it as raw material, the realistic potential of which had to be worked through in the succeeding phase, commonly (though perhaps misleadingly) called the age of Yeats. Rather than accuse Lever of personal failure, therefore, which in any case is a futile, if ideologically predictable, exercise, it is more appropriate to regard his failure as representative, irrespective of the importance or otherwise of the personal elements implicated in it.

As an author, Lever attempted, with a breadth of range and (relatively speaking) a persistency of effort, to determine both the character of Ireland as it was in the nineteenth century and as it should be. In this, he is related to both Maria Edgeworth and William Carleton, whose work shares a similar fundamental concern. It is important to emphasise that Lever is not the same kind of writer as either of his predecessors. He is related to them by virtue of sharing their concerns, and also by ratifying the fact in terms of a shared projected solution of, or relief from, those concerns, namely, the artistically manipulated yet emotionally-derived and emotionally-compelled integration of identity and community.

The dissimilarities between Lever and his forerunners are not insignificant. His work is much less narrowly prescriptive in

its ambit and didactic in manner than Edgeworth's, and it possesses greater technical range and cultural sophistication than Carleton's. Yet in concentrating his major, most sustained efforts on an aspect of the shared concern which Carleton virtually ignores and Edgeworth tends to rationalise away - namely absenteeism - Lever's output formally supplements that of his predecessors, so that all three collectively portray a comprehensive depiction of the life on the land question. Agrin, for all his ideological backslidings, Lever's orientation is much more firmly attached to, and intellectually identifiable in terms of, socio-cultural preoccupations. This too supplements the somewhat remote character of Edgeworth's theoretically ethical perspective, and Carleton's essentially ethnographical one. Yet neither one of the three succeed in exploring the full effects of their widely divergent, and unevenly developed, intellectual properties. Indeed, they share a common failure of intellectual flexibility, recognisable in the unacceptable lengths to which each of them idiosyncratically goes to sustain the claims of their one besetting idea, the terms of which are contained in the shared projection. Moreover, such a failure is common to their central figures (in fact their fiction might well be described as a fiction of central figures, who are divisively yet remedially preoccupied with the problematical nature of name-bearing and entitlement). The typical hero/heroine of their work is not so much deficient in intellectual capacity (nor is his/her author), as in an acceptance that consciousness, intellectually conceived, is an entirely adequate means of negotiating a world, the rationalist dimension of which is neither permanently or, in its temporary occasions persuasively, upheld. Therefore rather than explain the tyrannical fluctuation of circumstance which denotes the world of

phenomena, they opt for a sympathetic intervention in the world thus characterised, in the desire, invariably realised, to locate its essence. Here too it seems to me Lever goes farther and fares better than either Edgeworth or Carleton.

Yet, ultimately, despite his superior range, superior access to the possibility of meaning contained by contemporary ideology, and indeed the apparently 'natural' superiority of his fluency and inventiveness, Lever remains notable for his failure. In his range lay the unexplored possibility of utilising strong European fictional models which might have been adapted, by virtue of their development of the problematic of consciousness, to explore the condition of Ireland. His intimacy with the sources and motives of contemporary ideology might well have been harnessed, instead of being explicitly offset by an indwelling and over-determined attempt to erect the myth of the person as a repository of sentiment. The attributes of fluency and invention might well have produced an Irish Twain, had Lever possessed the artistic gumption to sink that creaking vessel, the Sir Walter Scott, in the waters of the Shannon (which he knew well), and become an unabashed regionalist.

Instead, he merely achieved an over-elaborate recapitulation of the vision of Maria Edgeworth. This in itself is not necessarily a trivial achievement, especially in view of its crucial preoccupation with absenteeism. The onus on the individual to consolidate a sense of identity by means of relocation in a state of stable presence, whose material characteristics require impersonal communal reconditioning, the ethic of which is non-egotistical service, is arguably more sharply perceived by Lever, because the possibility of its being unavailable is more sharply appreciated. The basic terms of desired equilibrium remain Edgeworth's, however, as indeed they are in Carleton's case. The failure of Lever provides the basis

of his work's thematic interest and his own place in literary history. It is more conspicuous than that of his forerunners because of his involvement in it, and more conclusive than theirs because no future Irish writer failed to deal with its fictional tractability. Not only did the Irish novel enter a different, more confident phase after Lever, but so did the cultural and political life of the country. Life on the land, perceived artistically and historically, took on possibilities which did not require projected solutions to substantiate them. Yet, in the very dogged repetition of a common projection, lies the significance and achievement of the nineteenth century Irish novel, the wish-fulfilling life it imbued to the relationship between identity and community. The inadequacy of the artistic vision should not diminish the painful compulsion of its creators to project it as the only honourable response to inadequacies of a more fundamental, realistic and non-imaginative kind. In his final inability conclusively to deflect that compulsion, in his misdirected attempt to tame the real by an ideal, Lever exemplifies the characteristic and representative paradox of both his own career and the artistic form containing it, as well as, thereby, demonstrating the significance of both.

FOOTNOTES
CHAPTER III

- 1 Mary Buckley, 'Attitudes to Nationality in Four Nineteenth Century Novelists: III Charles Lever', Journal of the Cork Historical and Archaeological Society, vol.80, no. 230 (1974), p.129.
- 2 Citations hereunder are from the Copyright Edition of the Novels of Charles Lever, edited by his daughter (London, Downey, 37 vols., 1897-9), followed by vol. and page numbers.
- 3 Dedication of the Irish Sketch Book (London, 2 vols., 1843).
- 4 For information and correspondence pertaining to this episode, see Flora V. Livingston (ed.), Charles Dickens's letters to Charles Lever (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1933).
- 5 Anthony Trollope, An Autobiography (London, [1883]; Williams & Norgate, 1946), p.224.
- 6 D.J. O'Donoghue, The Life of William Carleton (London, Downey, 2 vols., 1896), II, p.61.
- 7 D.J. Enright, 'A Note on Irish Literature and the Irish Tradition', Scrutiny, Vol.10, no.3 (January, 1942), p.248.
- 8 Thomas Flanagan, The Irish Novelists 1800-1850 (New York, Columbia University Press, 1959), p.46.
- 9 Oliver Elton, A Survey of English Literature (London, Arnold, 2 vols., 1920), II, p.171.
- 10 H.S. Krams, Irish Life in Irish Fiction (New York, Columbia University Press, 1903), p.90.
- 11 As argued by J.C. Beckett, 'Swift and the Anglo-Irish Tradition' in C.J. Rawson (ed.) Focus: Swift (London, Sphere Books, 1971), pp.155-170.
- 12 Volumes XVI and XVII, XXI and XXII, XXIX and XXX respectively of ed.cit.
- 13 T.H. Lister, 'Some Novels of Military and Naval Life', Edinburgh Review, Vol.52 (October, 1830), p.123.
- 14 Edmund Downey, Charles Lever. His Life in his Letters (Edinburgh and London, Blackwood, 2 vols., 1906) Vol.I, 153. Subsequent citations noted to Downey, volume and page numbers.
- 15 Dictionary of National Biography (London, Oxford University Press, 22 vols. 1949-50). XIII, p.138. For Maxwell, see Dublin University Magazine, Vol.18, no. 104 (August 1841), pp.220-226.
- 16 Downey, I, 72.

- 17 Lionel Stevenson, Dr. Quicksilver. The Life of Charles Lever (London, Chapman and Hall, 1939), p.120.
- 18 As Maire Cruise O'Brien suggests in her article 'The Two Languages', in Owen Dudley Edwards (ed.), Conor Cruise O'Brien Introduces Ireland (London, André Deutsch, 1969), p.49.
- 19 F.W. Chandler, The Literature of Roguery (London, Constable; Boston, Houghton, Mifflin, 2 vols., 1907), II, p.387.
- 20 Published serially in the Dublin University Magazine, Vol.35, no.204 (April 1850) to Vol.38, no.224 (December, 1851), but not published in book form until 1855.
- 21 Downey, I, p.157.
- 22 'The Black Mask', Dublin University Magazine Vol.7, no.41 (May 1836), pp.508-518.
- 23 R.B. McDowell, 'Dublin and Belfast - A Comparison', in McDowell (ed.), Social Life in Ireland 1800-1845 (Cork, The Mercier Press, 1963), p.13.
- 24 McDowell, op.cit., pp.13-14.
- 25 Michael Sadleir, 'Dublin University Magazine', The Bibliographical Society of Ireland Vol.4, no.4 (1938), p.63.
- 26 Charles Gavan Duffy, Young Ireland. A Fragment of Irish History 1840-1845 (Dublin, Gill, 1884), p.23.
- 27 Frank O'Connor, The Backward Look (London, Macmillan, 1967), p.151.
- 28 Gearóid O Tuathaigh, Ireland Before the Famine (Dublin, Gill & Macmillan, 1972), p.186.
- 29 'Gallery of Illustrious Irishmen. No. 1 - Goldsmith', Dublin University Magazine, Vol.7, no. 37 (January 1836), p.27. The phrase occurs in the editorial introduction to the series.
- 30 'Editor's Address', Dublin University Magazine, Vol.19, no.112 (April 1842), pp.423-4.
- 31 Charles Gavan Duffy, Young Ireland, p.185.
- 32 Charles Gavan Duffy, My Life in Two Hemispheres (London, T. Fisher Unwin, 2 vols., 1898), I, p.91n.
- 33 Donald Davie, The Heyday of Sir Walter Scott (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul), p.87.
- 34 Stevenson, op.cit., p.113: 'Like Walter Scott twenty years before, Lever was trying to live the life of a country gentleman of unlimited means and leisure...'
- 35 Duffy, My Life in Two Hemispheres I, p.70.

- 36 Duffy, Young Ireland, p.185
- 37 Stevenson, op.cit., pp.148-9.
- 38 'A Last Confession of Harry Lorrequer', Dublin University Magazine, Vol.23, no.138 (June, 1844), pp.757-764.
- 39 Downey, I, p.191.
- 40 Krans, op.cit., p.64.
- 41 T.W. Moody, 'Thomas Davis and the Irish Nation', Hermathena, Vol.103 (Autumn, 1966), p.21.
- 42 Downey, I, p.300.
- 43 Lionel Stevenson in the bibliography to Dr. Quicksilver notes that 'Gerald Fitzgerald' was 'not published in volume form until the collected edition of 1897' (p.299). It is not included in the Copyright Edition, and I have been unable to find another collected edition of this date. The novel appeared serially in the Dublin University Magazine, Vol.52, no.308 (January 1858) to Vol.55, no.321 (July, 1859).
- 44 Stevenson, op.cit., p.215.
- 45 Roger McHugh, Studies, Vol.27 (1938), p.258.
- 46 These efforts are seen to best advantage in Cornelius O'Dowd upon Men and Women and Other Things in General, a series of commentaries which appeared in Plackwood's between 1864 and 1872, some of which were collected and published (1st series, Edinburgh and London, Plackwood, 1864; 2nd and 3rd series, ibid, 1865). These compilations were not reprinted. For Lever's reactions to their reception, see Franklin R. Rolfe, 'Letters of Charles Lever to his Wife and Daughter', Huntington Library Bulletin Vol.10 (October, 1936), pp.167 ff.
- 47 'There is nothing like her.' Downey, II, p.330.
- 48 Downey, I, p.304.
- 49 Downey, I, p.299.
- 50 Flanagan, op.cit., p.46.
- 51 Stephen Gwynn, Irish Literature and Drama (London, Nelson, 1936), p.79.
- 52 Downey, I, p.342.
- 53 For details of the Martin family see Shevawn Lynam, Humanity Dick (London, Jamish Hamilton, 1975); and for a contemporary account of some of Lever's models see Maria Edgeworth, Tour in Connemara, and The Martins of Ballinahinch (ed. H.W. Butler, London, Constable, 1950).

- 54 Stevenson, op.cit., p.207.
- 55 Downey, II, p.192.
For a revealing account of the involvement of Protestant intellectuals in radical politics during the 1840s, focussing on an author who may be described as Lever's artistic opposite number, see W.J. McCormack, 'J. Sheridan le Fanu's "Richard Harston" (1848): The History of an Anglo-Irish Text', in Barker, Coombes, Hulme, Mercer, Musselwhite (eds.), 1848: The Sociology of Literature, (University of Essex, 1978), pp.107-125.
- 56 Downey, II, p.162.
- 57 'What I did in Belgrade by Bob Considine', Blackwood's Magazine, Vol.103 (January, 1868), pp.71-90.
- 58 The three works referred to here are thought of, respectively, by Lever as follows: 'about the best thing I have done'; 'I don't believe I shall do better than "Sir Brook"'; and 'the best magazine story I think I ever wrote.' (Downey, II, pp.58, 182, 204).
- 59 Downey, II, p.47.
- 60 Downey, II, p.201.
- 61 Downey, II, p.328.
- 62 Downey, op.cit., Vol.II, despite its obviously fundamental importance is limited by being almost exclusively devoted to Lever's correspondence with members of the Blackwood publishing family. The material available to Rolfe, op.cit., is also drawn on by Stevenson, op.cit., though somewhat haphazardly.
- 63 For an exposition and critique of these theories' Irish dimension see L.P. Curtis, jnr., Anglo-Saxons and Celts (Bridgeport, Conn., University of Bridgeport 1968).
- 64 Stevenson, op.cit., p.252.

CHAPTER IV
TOWARDS A TRADITION

1 The Achievement of Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever

The fiction considered in this thesis is concerned with the depiction and examination of realities, that is with circumstances and contingencies which are not in themselves fictitious. Indeed, it is one of the texts' more revealing ironies that their deficiencies are the result of attempts to encompass a surfeit of realities. These attempts pressed so heavily on the authors in question that a disciplined, level-headed, integrated and satisfyingly-proportioned account of the preoccupations underlying them proved impossible. As a substantiation of this view, it may be argued that the continuing problematic of artistic perspective which pervades the fiction examined is a direct implication of the apparently irresistible attachment to non-artistic ideological persuasion which, in different ways, had a crucial influence on the development of each of the three authors' careers.

But the significance of their fiction's failure to attain to satisfying, stable form is not contained in the sense of abortive artistic enterprise, as such. It is contained in the consistency of effect, exemplified in all the works examined, to withstand the idea of failure. Such efforts, of course, draw attention to the artistic cost which success in the authors' terms exacts. However, in nineteenth century Irish fiction of the type concerning us here (what might be called the proto-realist variety), the medium is not the message. On the contrary, message transcends medium, violating both in the process, but also assuring us of the object of the exercise. And the failure of the characteristic nineteenth century fictional mode - realism - to evolve in an Irish literary context

is offset by the fact that the fiction analysed above embodies and desires to make real (that is, to present authentic substantiation of) a code of which realism can only be a critique. That code is idealism, and it seems reasonable to refer to it as a code in view of that term's undertones of ethics and civility which are very much implied, even when they are not explicitly present, in the fiction of Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever.

As noted in the Introduction, this thesis deals with only one facet of nineteenth century Irish fiction, which I shall refer to from now on as the 'realist', though it must be borne in mind that this term is not to be automatically and securely related to the fictional type, realism, but is used to denote a tendency. (Similarly, my use of gothic is not to be taken as synonymous with the full-blooded Radcliffean variety of the mode.) More precisely, what I call the 'realist' tendency, or proto-realism, is intended to denote the formal limbo in which the texts considered exist, a state which while drawing on authentic fictional modes, notably the picaresque and the bildungsroman, fails either to inhabit or to transfigure them.

In its nineteenth century Irish fictional variants, the gothic conceives of its preoccupations in terms of what is exceptional, destructive and incurable, whereas the 'realist' mode deals with the typical, the adventurous, the redeemable. In other words, the gothic tendency places a greater emphasis on the temptations and compulsions of egotism (a psychological agency remarkable for its self-absorption) while the 'realist' tendency emphasises the obligations and restrictions of community (a moral sphere notable for its selflessness). Although it would be crass and redundant to elevate

one mode above another, particularly as much of the work in both implicitly confronts, by means of intensely convoluted sequences of enactment, complementary areas of problematic articulation, it may be argued that the challenge of idealism elicited a more comprehensive, more culturally sensitive, and more ideologically alert representation of the issues of being and belonging which its fictional occasions share with the gothic mode. Thus, while the mechanisms of 'realist' and gothic plots may be equally gimcrack, and as such incapable of providing an adequate sense of the real in their own right, the desire shared by the writers grouped in this thesis under the 'realist' heading to project an idealised, communal solution on to their subject matter brings us at least as near to the reality being thus transfigured as do the procedures of contemporary Irish gothicists. In nineteenth century Irish fiction, each mode is involved with the other, while both have separate traditions: once again, the characteristic pattern of distinct but related presence is in evidence. However, by attempting to respond to the desirability of idealism, the 'realist' tendency is at once more in keeping with the socio-political urgencies of the age and as little able to arrive at a stable, consolidating form of expressing them as the social and political leaders themselves.

It is not simply the case, however, that those novels dealing with the idea of life on the land may be regarded as idealist in orientation because they represent, or depict, to an ideal degree the basically ethnographic approach to life on the land, or a carefully synchronised congruence with currents of contemporary ideology. Neither ethnography or ideology, whatever their preponderance (or even their interrelationship) in a given work, are ultimately ends in themselves. In other words, the works considered above are not only explicitly intended to be regarded as cultural

documents, but they also contain peculiarly literary devices intended to ratify their claims to cultural relevance, as well as coincidentally acting as vehicles to convey the texts' given burden of idealism. In attempting to provide an overall characterisation of this part of the nineteenth century Irish fictional spectrum, I should like to dwell on the two fictional foci which consistently carry the various authors' idealising propensities. These foci can be described as agent and ambit, or the young man and the locale he is obliged to inhabit, or the locus of self (identity) and the locus of world (community). I believe that enough has been said already to establish the reciprocally dependent relationship between these two foci, and the dual but discordant development to which each is subject in the other's presence. By way of conclusion, I simply want to offer a general description of the literary character and utility of these twin foci in order to substantiate my claim that the general tendency of the fiction discussed is idealist.

Taking the presence of the youth first of all, one notices obviously that all three authors consider youth to be germane to their purpose. Their common use of inexperience, of a disposition to formative influence, of vulnerability and of amorousness are consistently deployed with a view to making the condition of youthfulness 'natural', by which each of the three authors seem to mean, 'reliant upon the intrinsic'. Their protagonists are provided with identities which invariably embody an unspoilt and, as their adventures reveal, incorruptible fund of attributes, the source and variety of which is never adequately ascertained. Because of the obscurity of the origins of 'the natural' in these protagonists, they strike the reader not as young men or women engaged in the necessarily open-ended, provisional and unsettling business of negotiating inexperience,

vulnerability and the like so much as characters in a more literal sense, that is figures bearing a specific, intentional inscription whose meaning they unwittingly substantiate. The function of such characters is to be present, or, to be attentive to the norms of presence laid down for them by their authors' treatment of ambit. In other words, their function is not usually initiatory or innovative or particularly active. Representative passages of their careers deal with being misled, waylaid, confused, or in abeyance, waiting for a world to present itself which will validate their intrinsic, 'natural' endowments.

The evolution of such a type may be observed in the chronological progress of the works and authors dealt with. The character of Maria Edgeworth's men is closest to the notion of character as graphism mentioned just now, as might be expected in view of the author's didacticism and its diagrammatic leanings. Strangely, and in direct contrast to their successors, these young men seem largely humourless - strangely because of the humour with which their immediate surroundings are treated. However, the predominantly deleterious comedy of Irish pretensions to stylish social life is seen to be devoid of meaning, that is it may only contribute by a process of negative discrimination to the implicitly epistemological venture which the young protagonist has undertaken. (It is possible to describe these Edgeworthian protagonists' careers as possessing an epistemological substructure, since, to a greater extent than their later companions, they are implicated in questions of social meaning and personal awareness. To some extent also, there is rather more of an initiatory bias to their careers.)

But, even given the relevance of epistemological substructure, these young men attain to significance more as exemplars than as individuals, which is not merely what Edgeworth requires of

them, but what she obliges them to require of themselves. Thus whatever they are, the process of learning is represented as a series of occasions, vignettes, cameos, tableaux amounting collectively to a moral fable, showing that not only are they capable of learning, but that such a capacity is in itself a reproduction of intrinsic merit, denominated 'the natural'. Nevertheless, despite the fact that such fiction is basically too schematic to come to life except at a level of policy, theory, or intentional cultural utterance, it must be remembered that it was at precisely such a level that it was meant to claim attention and assert meaning. Thus, the relegation of comedy to a subsidiary role in the delimitation of the protagonists' careers is both artistically objectionable and didactically vital. Indeed the degree of pedantic vitality, the determination to round out the lesson, usually at the cost of plausibility, is a species of idealism in its own right. In terms of the author personally it is a touchingly simple faith, and in terms of a largely dormant culture an inchoately complex one, in the moral profitability of answers. This faith is the obverse of that spirit of ethical superiority and durability vested in 'the natural', and the quality of such an investment consecrates the natural as the ideal, or is shown in the progress of Edgeworth's protagonists: they never wholly decline, on their behalf the world ultimately improves.

Yet by offering an ideal at the level of cultural utterance, Edgeworth is suggesting that it be substituted for actuality. In ways which she declines to control - most obviously in the failure to realise how her ideal might be converted into the practicalities and limitations of life on the land - her vision comes under stress as soon as it is queried. This is due not just to intellectual considerations relating, for example, to the notion of national socio-

economic polity implied by that vision. It is also, and in view of the present purpose, more importantly, ascertainable from the contrived, inadequately proportioned fictional strategy by which it achieves material expression and putative coherence.

As noted already, the work of Edgeworth's successors embodies the fate of her ideal under stress. Yet though the stress is conspicuous, receiving conclusive community emphasis in Carleton's work and maximum concentration on identity in Lever's later novels, the ideal, located in a youthful protagonist remains constant. In Edgeworth's view the gulf between what is and what should be is rhetorically negotiable. In the work of her successors, despite their obvious and acknowledged debts to her, the gulf is explicitly prominent, with the corresponding effect that any attempt to bridge it must seem even more contrived than before. And in fact the nature of the contrivance itself becomes more specific, limited and inadequate: it is articulated through a far more parochial and contemporary ideological affiliation than that contained in Edgeworth's standpoint.

The clearest modulation of the youthful protagonists' characters from Edgeworth to Carleton to Lever is to be seen in the relinquishment of stiffness and a greater reliance on the comedic or pathetic manner of mediating intrinsic qualities. In Carleton, such reliance is conveyed in unadulterated emotional terms, to such an extent that the prose itself is subject to manic-depressive oscillations, the range, temper and unpredictable duality of which are the clearest, but least consciously implemented, expression of the gulf with which both character and fictional world are menaced. With Lever, the emotional terms are not so blatant, though their relevance has just as much urgency as in Carleton's case. However,

the heading under which they now achieve standing, 'spirit', is at once more acute and more mystifying - more acute, because of its romantic emphasis on organic essence and innerness, but more mystifying because both its psychological lineage and supposedly clarifying influence on the external world are more debatable.

Yet in Carleton's rawness and Lever's refinement, there is a consistent assertion of the protagonists' innerness being the one necessary criterion both for evaluating the merit of their claims on our attention and for appreciating the relationships they ultimately arrive at with the world. In a sense, then, the more resolutely the challenge to write of a world which Maria Edgeworth was unable to face is taken up, the greater documentary emphasis must be placed on the scars and afflictions of that world. Correspondingly, therefore (or so the artistic logic of these texts seem to say), the stressful claims on innerness are built up, making the possession of an inviolable intrinsic nature all the more precious, and all the more problematic. The primary evasion evident in the work of Lever and Carleton is the unwillingness to allow character to be other than utterly idealistic (or incurably malevolent). Yet it is part of the rhetorical strategy accompanying idealism defensively conceived (that is, conceived of and presented as the only available response) that a protagonist is not simply an embodiment of ideals, but is, in him- or herself, ideal. To act as an embodiment of ideals, the origins of which may be extrapersonal, might entail a process of selection, evaluation, discrimination, the development of a critical faculty and of an individuated consciousness. In keeping with the work of their literary forebear, Edgeworth, no such development is contemplated. On the contrary, consciousness as such is regarded as the disabling antithesis of action. It is in

being unreflectingly and, at heart, unassailably ideal that they characterise not the social, the cultural, the political or the economic, but the natural, that explicitly undefined realm of presence, discrete from, but equivalent to, other integrated realms of presence. If these youths are natural, they are as nature is, fundamentally and incontrovertibly loyal to what is their own. They cannot be changed, they may only be ruined. Worldly experience is a snare and a delusion. The ideal, in effect, is simply and blessedly nature's human condition. If landed estates did not exist for such creatures, they would have to have been invented.

Land, the organic (or, in political terms, feudal) society which it 'naturally' supports, the virtually unsocialised, dehistoricised, terrain, haunted by the shades of golden bygone years, is the obvious counterpart of the ideal identity embodied in the protagonists characterised above. It's an obvious counterpart because of its natural associations, its tractability yet final invulnerability (even famine, the despair of the land, may be defied), and its middle-distance remoteness from the plainly fabricated (urban) man-made environment. It possesses a mystique, deliberately so in the eyes of Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever, since they regard land more as a realm to be possessed and inhabited, than as one to be worked and developed. Indeed, Lever, again in his role of conclusive case, tends to regard exploration of land resources as a species of newfangledness, symptomatic of contemporary selfishness. The land itself is presented as a condition of equilibrium, of optimum presence. To possess that condition is both the aspiration of the protagonist and the confirmation of his own nature.

Yet although the land is understood throughout the fiction examined as an appropriate backdrop to protagonists' activities, its

existence has a remoteness comparable, in terms of unexamined assumptions, to the innerness of the protagonists' natures. Obviously it is not the life of the land that's being portrayed, a life in which the human organism coexists with and to some extent is seen to be on the same ontological plane as the terrain which sustains them. The works may issue a note of regret for a pastorale which is not available. But the minor key and relative inaudibility of this note suggests an awareness, if not a preparedness to demonstrate fully, that not only is there no material or historical basis for the regret but that an idyllically pastoral way of life is impossible to reproduce, though necessary and desirable to imaginatively project. (It is not surprising that one of the major tensions within these novels' narrative contents should be between a, so to speak, 'black' pastoral reality and ideal pastoral cleaning; of that reality (hence, perhaps, the vaguely missionary aura surrounding characters as diverse as Lord Colambre, Jemmy M'Evoy, and Mary Martin, an aura owing something, no doubt, in the cases of Carleton and Lever, to their acquaintance with the church militants of the 'New Reformation'.))

Despite the significance of the land, however, the infrequent and generally stereotyped descriptions of it suggest that it is not to be seen primarily as being economically productive or socially evolved. On the contrary its blend of economic incompetence and scenic stimulus provides a parallel to the youthful restorers' combination of inexperience, underdevelopment and plausibility. The concern therefore is not with the life of the land, but with life on the land: hence the atavistic desire for tenure, establishment, homestead - components of a dream of unchangingness. This dream, desire, ideal (and, in view of the fiction's overwhelming reliance on the rite de passage as a mode of narrative exposition, this

legitimately earned) attainment has to contend with one crucial recognition, in which all three authors repose the reality of the land, namely the condition of the peasantry.

It is doubtful whether 'the peasantry' in the nineteenth century Irish novel are to be viewed strictly as such, namely as workers of the soil, or whether the term 'native' is not a more helpful one. In keeping with the inchoate remoteness of the land itself and its condition, the native inhabitants are depicted as having no developed and articulate forms of existence. They have no institutions, no intrinsic social order, no material resources to speak of. Yet not only are such conditions remarkable in their own right, the subject of much expository cogitation, but even more remarkably, in necessary key instances representative natives will, by virtue of their own biddable and unselfish natures, be of crucial assistance to the protagonist in his quest for life on the land. Viewed externally, the native is in the same dilapidated, socially infertile condition as the land. Seen internally, he exhibits the same sense of 'the natural' as that attributed to our young protagonists. Thus, the association of the youthful seeker with those who are, superficially, his opposite numbers (even when the action is exclusively located within the native ambit, as in The Poor Scholar) is a formal recognition of the peculiar 'dual number' phenomenon of this fiction, exemplified in the recurring notion of distinct but related aspects of a totality.

The native, therefore, represents a pre-existent life for the protagonist. He is the living patrimony, the uncorrected mistake, sure at heart for no ostensible reason other than that he has found change beyond him. And he is also the future, the rest of the hero's

life, the untapped potential implicitly requiring adequate form. It is from the marriage of these twin likenesses that identity and community are interrelated and consolidated. The marriage comes about through a recognition by both parties of their inner kinship, a recognition which, in order to maintain a consistent level of idealisation, takes place not because of an access of consciousness but due to an adjustment in circumstances; that is, by virtue of the same inscrutable but inevitable momentum of process discernible 'in nature'. Thus what is evolved is a recipe for living, a format, a residence, a delimitation of property as an analogue of entitlement to self-possession. The possibility of community is enlarged and substantiated, not the activity of communal living, much less a confrontation with the realities of Irish society (I distinguish here between depiction and confrontation). In effect, the conditions which demonstrate the existence of a binding, mutually productive and above all, stabilising relationship between identity and community are simply posited. As such, the result is not a reality; that is, it has none of the texture, variety and relativity of the real. Instead, it is an ideal, essential but untestable, transformative but reactionary, ideologically sound but intellectually circumscribed.

Materially speaking, the marriage announces itself not in the creation of a place of work, or in the enlargement of the social horizons of all concerned. It announces itself in the formation of an enclave where the inner natures of all the inhabitants can come fully into play, legitimising and giving an appropriate prominence to the cultural graces possessed by each party but hitherto either confined to unworthy outlets (witness the plight of youth in metro-

politan company), or almost completely oppressed (for example, the irrelevance of folk wisdom, panaceas, whimsy and the like as defences against inept handling by superiors). The establishment of the non-national, proto-social, localised and atavistic enclave facilitates merely the ratification of the innerness which contrived to bring it about, and the externalisation of that innerness, being devoid of political innovation or any other kind of particularised specification of the real, can only be acknowledged under the generalised heading of 'cultural'. Evaluated in terms of an identifiable reality, the cultural enclave is a limbo, and as such a precise representation of the evasive, defensive and etiolated idealism which informs and supposedly justifies it. In its generality it is the final incompleteness, an attenuated, or 'rigged', totality whose ultimate lack of complexity is the most crucial and revealing illustration of the pre-conscious character of the fiction examined. It is the consistent presence of such limitations, and the idealising common motive which gives rise to them, which denote the achievement of Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever.

2 Irish Fiction: Nineteenth Century and Afterwards

Irish fiction in the nineteenth century, as examined in this thesis, is pre-conscious in a descriptive and in a conceptual sense. Descriptively, this means that the main narrative interest lies in areas in which consciousness plays a marginal part. Instead of being presented in terms of an enabling awareness, characters are usually observed in the possession of some other version of the mind, such as spiritedness, sense of duty, or the like, grouped together above as idealism. At worst, this makes them merely mouthpieces for their authors; at best, it shows them to be an

unselfconscious embodiment of a model of mind which they can't control. The implied relationship between control and consciousness suggests that, in literary terms at least, the characters are deprived of, or unable to create, a space in which their own distinctiveness may be perceived as a viable possession. A lack of sufficiently rigorous and dependable criteria, sufficient to facilitate epistemologically the coexistence of self and world, denotes the poverty of the actuality which the protagonists are obliged to negotiate. It also reveals consciousness to be a taunting problematic of presence, and the sine qua non of the ideal of integration. The compulsion to locate such a space denotes the rhetorical significance of the protagonists' communal ratification.

In the course of the fiction we've been discussing, then, consciousness is the crucially present, and the crucially unresolved, preoccupation. It is possible, therefore, to describe what takes place in that fiction, as a struggle for and against consciousness. It is a struggle for individuated but undeveloped mentality to possess and delimit the essential, materially realisable status of its heritage, and against that mentality's tendency to develop into mature individuality. The result is the unimpeachably motivated fabrication of cultural silhouettes and ideological profiles, of protagonists whose faithful quest for something larger than themselves blinds them to the possibilities of self. The broken world which they represent (by virtue of their attempts to repair it), has the unforeseen yet painfully inevitable repercussion of suppressing that radical, restless entity, the individual psyche. The very exigencies of idealist projection confirm the existence of disabling, inchoate, schizoid conditions, not the resolution of them, no matter how ardently and genuinely desired. The contents of the works

discussed, despite their localised range and vigour, and even despite their latent propensity towards achieving their most representative norms as a comedy of dissolution (à la Sterne), exist in a condition which can be described as a condition prior to consciousness.

Conceptually speaking, Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever are blocked in an artistic impasse which corresponds directly to the psychological, social, and ultimately cultural debilities suffered, and putatively consummated, by their protagonists. These protagonists implicitly, and unconsciously, provide access to the problematic of consciousness, because their authors, while aware of the pitfalls of false awareness, present the antidote to falsity as a rejection of the manner by which it is apprehended. In other words, misleading and destabilising experience of the world is conclusively offset, not so much by corrective experience, as by a self-less, voluntary surrender to presence. The pre-determination of value, revealed through a consistently pedantic narrative theme, obviously absolves the protagonist from determining value on his own account. The artistic obligations which accompany the pre-determining imperative result in the fabrication of circumstantial evidence, which further reinforces the exemplifying, stereotypical, yet 'naturally' idealistic career of the protagonists.

In the sense that the protagonist is offered a closed system within which to function, he reproduces - that is, he uncritically lays claim to - the same sense of confinement which governs the outlook of his progenitors. Their consciousness is similarly restricted by a sense of duty not to their talents, but to something greater: namely a representation of Ireland 'as it should be', that is Ireland in a pacified, productive, harmonious, and essentially unchanging and unproblematic state. The most obvious illustration of

this artistic surrender, or retreat into selflessness, is the fact that despite the initiatory uniqueness of Castle Rackrent, nobody either abides by, or examines, its innovative artistic procedures. For all the intended objectivity of the model in which these authors' idealism is located, the presuppositions of the idealism itself are basically subjective and, whatever their documentary provenance, culturally relative formulations. They sublimate in adopted public terms the individuating consciousness which might, if it were adequately self-possessed, challenge those very terms upon which it was reliant, in the name of the composure misguidedly believed to accrue to public responsibility. These authors do not speak their own minds, at least not in their fiction (in contrast to their essays and letters, and in Carleton's case, his Autobiography, all of which are very much alive with quirky, refreshingly unpedantic and non-ideological aperçus). On the contrary, they speak in a collective, impersonal, and in cultural terms entirely anachronistic, mentality. In failing to identify their own artistic vision in terms that would substantiate individual responsibility for consciousness, Edgeworth, Carleton and Lever failed to conceptualise the significance of consciousness for their own artistic ends. As such, then, they as artists, and the conception of their artistic commitment, exist in a pre-conscious state.

The intellectual and cultural provenance of the fiction examined is anachronistic because it refuses to form a critical relationship with its eighteenth century heritage. Not only is the idealist orientation of the fiction eighteenth century in character, but so is the world it seeks to underwrite. Indeed certain textual features, such as Edgeworth's and Lever's satirical views of nascent bourgeois pretension, and all three writers'

inadequately resolved comedies of sexuality and fortune, ~~are~~ reminiscent of eighteenth century tone and plot. More crucial than these, however, is the sense of a tightrope to be walked between the chaotic and the ideal, a course negotiated by 'the natural', a condition which is a model of integrated man. That the negotiation is obliged to take place in a world beset by the particularities of incoherence makes the tightrope a great deal more tenuous and slippery, but it also requires that its location is materially identifiable and materially stable.

From the cultural point of view, the heritage of these nineteenth century Irish authors is intimately and uncritically bound up with the glorious moment of the first and, effectively, only expression of comprehensive socio-political identity on the part of the Irish Ascendancy, an expression stimulated in part by events in America in the 1770s and ultimately overcome by the rebellion of 1798 and the Act of Union which swiftly followed it. The character of that expression was essentially public and collective, as its monument, Dublin's Georgian town houses, suggest. Its moment remains frozen in well-proportioned façades, whose continuing presence exists as a cultural subtext to the representation of integrated structure, not as a specific result of the politico-cultural dynamics and processes of such attenuations of perspective. Writers such as those dealt with here were, by virtue of birth, education, and/or ideological affiliation, the immediate inheritors of that public grandeur and aborted consciousness of these failed-rebel forbears, for whom Ireland 'as it should be' was thought to be compatible with Loyalism. (Such a view can be retrospectively seen as one of the most basic plot-types of the novels which psycho-culturally reproduce

their fate, namely the triumph of the ideal of honour over the more grubby expediency of political activity.) Not surprisingly, perhaps, the preoccupation with redeemed honour, conceived of as the epistemological linchpin of narratives depicting the disruption of family and the defacement of place, is responsible for fiction in which history (the metaphysic of contingency) can only be apprehended as rhetoric, not as process - as a grammar of persuasion the gratuitousness of whose effects is incidental to the integrity of its ends.

Taking, for the purpose simply of maintaining this line of thought, the fact of there being no entirely satisfactory nineteenth century Irish historical novel - a disturbing observation, bearing in mind the general indebtedness of nineteenth century fiction (particularly its regional variants) to Scott, the history besotted intellectual atmosphere in which our trio of writers grew up, and the numerous efforts made by them and their gothicist colleagues - as an example of the poverty of achievement endemic to and expressive of nineteenth century Irish fiction, it may be asserted that the problem of continuity, and of tradition, was a dauntingly large one for the inheritors of this period, so large in fact that writers of the stature of Yeats and Joyce are conventionally regarded not as inheritors but as having articulated an Irish idiom ab ovo. This conventional view is undoubtedly a fitting measure of these two key figures' stature. Yet, even if there is no direct evidence of continuity in the work of Joyce, for example, and indeed, on the contrary, there is explicit evidence of repudiation (Stephen Dedalus's reference to 'the cracked lookingglass of a servant'¹), it seems to me to increase the stature of such a writer, and is a means of asserting

an important aspect of his significance in an Irish context, to regard him, from both an obvious cultural standpoint as well as from a less obvious artistic one, as at least an implicit legatee of the pre-conscious period (the degree of implicitness resides in the comprehensiveness of repudiation).

To speak of the tradition exemplified by any area of Irish culture is to silently employ the dual number, since every tradition has at least two main strands. The struggle to separate these has, as a matter of honour (or so it appears to the late-coming non-combatant), been carried out with all the heretical obsession of the apologist and ideologue, resulting in the weaving of a champion's banner from one strand, and the consigning of the other to the enemy's rag and bone shop. This procedure, for which nationalist cultural commissars stand most blatantly accused (since, as victors, their generosity was more obviously on trial than was their piety), has had the effect of reinforcing the very tendency to ideological simplification which distorted the outlook of those whom they attacked. It is important, therefore, to acknowledge and attempt to account for the valuably necessary complexity of the nature of tradition.

Clearly no more than a sketch of its complexity can be attempted here, but that at least should help to install a sense of the relevance of the relationship between identity and community envisaged in the work examined above. Perhaps the most succinct way to denote the complexity of the question is to examine it under the two headings already employed, that is, descriptively and conceptually.

As mentioned above, one of the principal prosodic devices of nineteenth century Irish fiction was its indwelling, and to a large

extent artistically subconscious reliance on the vignette, the sketch, the tableau, in other words on prose forms which by virtue of their artistic presuppositions were not developmental in expository tendency, nor were they equipped to reproduce the dynamics of process which we associate with the prosodical norms of the novel. The fact that they remain present at a subconscious artistic level may be seen from their undeveloped status within the works considered, as well as from the implicit lack of recognition accorded their cultural expressiveness. It may be argued, in support of the latter contention, that the formal character of those modes is a precise reproduction of the ideal of consummation projected as resolution by the three authors in question.

A description of the evolution of Irish fiction in the aftermath of its pre-conscious phase should, therefore, take account of this omnipresent pictorialising and stabilising propensity. It should also be noted, however, that this propensity is formally manifest in two distinct ways in the fiction of the later period. First of all, it provides for the frequently-adumbrated 'genius' of Irish short fiction. Again, because of the lack of an adequate critical history of the genesis and provenance of such a genius, the remarks offered here must needs be incompletely synthesised. On a general level, the installation of short fiction as an expressive, viable form for literary prose in Ireland, however much indebted thematically to nineteenth century efforts in the same vein, coincides with the raising to artistic consciousness, and the development of artistic potential, of the lyric, evanescent but formally perdurable moment. The best known, and most culturally decisive example of this (precisely because of its reworking of the nineteenth century ethnographic and folk-lore impulse in terms which, far from extracting

cultural significance from such material, lent it the aura of artistic mystique) is Yeats's The Celtic Twilight (1893). The ratification of presence, the most immediate effect of which was (as in Edgeworth's day) the installation of a voice, was not the inauguration of a conceptually critical literature, but a declaration that presence was in itself a viable formal pretext. And although there is little obvious connection between the young, undeveloped and ideologically insecure Yeats who commissioned the gesture of The Celtic Twilight and those who went on to find their own artistic perspective with its assistance, there is no doubt that the vocal and perceptual configurations mapped by Yeats had an enduring effect.

The fact that the influence endured may be due less to Yeats's specific artistic intention in compiling The Celtic Twilight than to the fact that much of the material upon which the criteria for artistic norms of presence might be erected concerned the familiar cultural occasions of individual and place. On the socio-political front, the principal success in the Parnell period, the chronology of which (from 1874, when Parnell was first elected to Parliament, to his death in 1891) is also precisely that of the interregnum in Irish literary endeavour, was wholly connected with the piecemeal but certainly progressive dismantling of the typical structures of life on the land which had been experienced by the variously alienated writers dealt with in this thesis and which had nourished their compensatory idealism. One illustration of the reordering brought about by these changes will perhaps reveal their cultural significance. The redemption of lands cleared by eviction orders, and the recognition of tenants' proprietorial responsibilities, effectively terminated the local and some of the general abuses of absenteeism. In particular, the psychological dichotomy experienced by the peasantry in their

paradoxical role of resident absentees, was at least from the standpoint of self-ratifying material engagement, being gradually removed.

In terms of realpolitik, therefore, a relationship between identity and community was seen to be statutorily and materially feasible. It is precisely that point of arrival which the literary characterisation of presence adopts and formulates as a coördinating iconographical device in the fiction which ensued from the Parnellite period, and which, with certain significant thematic refinements, still exists in contemporary Irish fiction, though its expository utility can be seen to be now reaching exhaustion. And while lists prove nothing, it is interesting to trace a tradition of fictional enterprise whose central interest is a fundamentally unproblematic representation of presence. Such a list would include Knocknagow, or The Homes of Tipperary (1879) by Charles Kickham, a prominent member of the Irish Republican Protherhood; When We Were Boys (1890) by William O'Brien, one of Parnell's two chief lieutenants; the stories of Daniel Corkery, amateur water-colourist and principal literary ideologue of the emergent people, together with his novel, The Threshold of Quiet (1917); Seán O Faoláin's A Nest of Simple Folk (1933); Frank O'Connor's novel Dutch Interior (1940); and Peadar O'Donnell's novel, set in the years surrounding the fall of Parnell, The Big Windows (1955).

Interesting as this adaptation of an established norm is, it must be allowed that it remains an implicit artistic development. In other words, the works cited, despite their emphasis on presence, regard the condition unproblematically. This development can only be treated descriptively because of the inherently descriptive character of the works themselves. Invariably they refuse to

consider the provenance of the delimitations inherent in the iconographing mode, and as such, notwithstanding the significant sense of cultural ratification contained in them, they constitute not so much a change in the conceptual orientation of Irish fiction as an appropriate development of one of the functional tropes of the pre-conscious mode.

One way of recognising the artistically limited nature of this particular strand of tradition is to concede that they are deliberately and self-consciously novels of condition, not novels of character. In them one sees again identity voluntarily absorbed and sublimated by community. They are, perhaps, in the endemically anachronistic manner of Irish fictional heritage, more artistically satisfying and culturally adequate nineteenth century regional romances than any of their nineteenth century predecessors. Moreover, the transposition of much of the material denoting the cultural attainment of presence into short fiction, a form the epistemological presuppositions of which may be broadly regarded as being provocatively distinct from those of the novel, is in my view further evidence both of the significance to Irish literary development of the lyric and momentary modes and of the failure to utilise the dynamic, dialectical and resolving properties of the novel. Frank O'Connor's perfectly tenable generalisation that the short story is primarily concerned with submerged population groups² holds good as a description of its peculiar cultural relevance to writers of Irish fiction.

Before moving on from this set of considerations, however, it must be emphasised again that such generalised treatment is inherently imprecise. In particular, the career of Seán O Faoláin, the most intellectually able of the writers involved in this phase of development, can only be seen as a parallel case of development,

essentially belonging by virtue of the author's background and the themes of his work (especially his pre-1945 output) to this strand of the tradition, yet in tone extremely critical of it. Yet the function of his critical standpoint is, in the works which most obviously embody it (especially the novel Bird Alone, 1936, and the collection of stories, A Purse of Coppers, 1937), to repudiate the cultural conditions which gave rise to it, producing texts the more distinctive characteristic of which is failed resolution, emotional impasse, isolation from the community.

The conjunction of Joyce and O Faoláin, preserved for history in the former's decorous note acknowledging receipt of Bird Alone³ (a novel expressly preoccupied with the constraining shibboleths and impoverishing practices of 'home, faith and fatherland' - though not at all with the artistic retaliation of 'silence, exile and cunning') provides a convenient moment in which to begin examining the other strand of the tradition, generalised above as belonging under the 'conceptual' heading. O Faoláin's awareness of having inherited 'a broken world', to quote the title of the keynote story in A Purse of Coppers, is a matter of bitterness, resentment and, not infrequently, sentimentality. In Joyce's work it is a matter of stark representation, as in Dubliners, or attack, as in A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, or the substance of an artistically revolutionary vision, as in Ulysses. (There the principal expository norm is a set of variations based on diatonic, syncopated, unsynchronised, overlapping scales concerned with seeing and knowing, giving maximum artistic credence to both the stasis of presence and the dynamics of comprehension. If only for its preparedness to confront the dual, not entirely reconcilable yet

explicitly co-existing signatures of the norm and achieve thereby an epistemology of brokenness - not a morality, much less a politics, of the condition - Ulysses stands as the Irish novel supreme.)

Joyce's decisive and exemplary distinction was to attain artistic consciousness, and to let his fiction emanate from the security and integrity of that possession. He created for himself a state of awareness independent of, yet implicitly a synthesis of, his heritage. The most obvious means by which he achieved this was by entering into critical relation to it, identifying the already existing hemiplegia for what it was, instead of resorting to the ideology of prevailing cultural apologetics in order to accommodate it. (The incipient symptoms of the artistic effects of hemiplegia can be observed in the Dublin of the 1840s, where, despite the clamour of ideological faction fighting, artistic possibilities were stultified, as observed in the treatment of Carleton's and Lever's problematically developing careers above.) Yet, in the creation of an artistic persona, or at least in a typification of those concerns to which an artist should address himself, Joyce availed himself of an iconographical trope which can, at least taxonomically, be related to the heritage of presence previously discussed.

In calling his credo 'A Portrait' Joyce was implicitly using a term redolent of the stabilising devices prevailing, to no ultimately credible or stable avail, in the fiction which was part of his heritage, but which he may never have read. (As to Joyce's reading of nineteenth century Irish fiction, I can only conjecture. However, the decline of Simon Dedalus - a character whose early career, as related to his son, is to some extent reminiscent, both idiomatically and contextually, of the spirited adventures of Harry Lorrequer in the same city of Cork - is silently observed throughout the novel, a gesture towards his conceivable fictional

provenance which, so to speak, is tonally perfect. The glimpses of literary provenance caught in Joyce's characterisation of Simon make him imaginatively compatible with the sense of heritage which Stephen sees embodied in his friend Davin the Gael, a sense denoted by the phrase 'one of the broken lights of Irish myth'⁴ - a formulation which anticipates his aphorism about the 'lookingglass'. So also is the not unsympathetic, but not unreluctant, farewell to the schematised peasant figure, a cartoon of the focus of much contemporary literary endeavour, one of the intentions of which was to realign the nineteenth century cultural enterprise. The point, however, is not how well acquainted Joyce might have been with the fiction that preceded him, but to illustrate the uses to which generally available, and particularly representative, categories of perception may be put, and to note from that the necessarily complex resources of tradition.)

In the 'portrait' of Stephen Dedalus, Joyce is objectively depicting both a range of formative influences, in which is obviously contained the idea of heritage and tradition (though conveyed in a manner which violates and distorts), and a response to them. The response is equal and opposite to the impact of traditional influences, and is dual and contradictory in character. Initially Stephen entirely absolves himself, as he is encouraged to do by the rhetoric and ritual of the inherited influences, from individuated consciousness, identifying entirely with their impersonal, ratifying and non-problematical agency. The success of this is such as to be transparent, and ultimately, by virtue of the ardour of idealised projection, the communally shared and communally inherited norms are both experienced and, as a result, consciously perceived to be, untenable. Whatever degree of alienation accrues to the repudiation

of community (conceived in terms of putative structural durables such as family, race and nationality - coincidentally the very norms investigated by Lever in the works which, as I've attempted to show, are the ultimate manifestation of the pre-conscious phase), it is, by virtue of its being voluntarily commissioned, more negotiable than that resulting from blind or unproblematic, identification. For Stephen, identity is capable of superseding community, and by doing so, challenging it. This conclusion ratifies the a priori reality of consciousness, and as such is a fittingly revolutionary outcome of the youthful protagonist who successfully inhabits the fictional form from which his Irish antecedents were debarred, namely the bildungsroman. In this text then, Joyce establishes through a critique of culturally pre-established iconographical nodes, a critique of the received present which results in the installation of an incontrovertible new present, delimiting through the figure of the artist (and the emphasis consistently falls on the figure, not on his activity, bearing out the quality and necessity of presence in 'portrait') a novel innerness, a radical attenuation of 'nature'. In this sense, as well as those argued elsewhere,⁵ he can be regarded as the revaluer of the basically eighteenth century epistemological mode of Irish nineteenth century fiction.

Joyce's achievement is still the most significant challenge to the artistic and cultural presuppositions of Irish fiction. His work clarifies, by means unavailable to and largely unsought by his predecessors, their at once necessary and helpless failure to create a realist novel in their own time. The installation of artistic awareness as a stable model of the problematic of individuated perception, establishes a sound basis for deconstructing the deeply ironic dovetailing tendency of the 'realist' leaning. The mirror

which Stephen Dedalus imaginatively perceives is significant because it is a servant's. The attribution consolidates its cultural reality. But it is more important because it is cracked, since that gives it its artistic relevance, and in the light of the fiction with which we have been mainly preoccupied, its artistic truth. Yet it is not too fanciful to think of it as the mirror in which Maria Edgeworth hardly dared to look, one hundred years previously. The crack is the reality, and must needs be artistically recorded as such. But the reality pre-empts the possibility of a relationship between identity and community. The Daedalus myth is powerful. Yet it is necessary also, as I've tried to establish in this thesis, to admit the power of the Antaeus myth, to acknowledge the compulsion, because of its particular urgencies, to be the artificer of a dream-ideal of life on the land.

FOOTNOTESCHAPTER IV

- 1 James Joyce, Ulysses (London, John Lane The Bodley Head, 1941), p.5.
- 2 Frank O'Connor, The Lonely Voice (Cleveland, World, 1963), p.18.
- 3 Richard Ellman (ed.) Selected Letters of James Joyce (London, Faber & Faber, 1975), p.382.
- 4 James Joyce, A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man (London, Jonathan Cape, 1968), p.184.
- 5 By Hugh Kenner, Dublin's Joyce (Gloucester, Mass., Peter Smith, 1969).

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